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THE SABBATH IS FOREVER

A Symposium

Marc D. Angel — Theodore Friedman — Elliot K. Ginsburg
Robert Gordis — Cyrus H. Gordon — Uri Gordon — Israel Knox
W. Gunther Plaut — Pinchas Peli — Seymour Siegel
Phillip Sigal — Jacob J. Staub
Chaim I. Waxman

THE *AKEDAH* IN MODERN JEWISH LITERATURE

Michael Brown

A NEW CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF THE HOLOCAUST

David Novak

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

Judaism will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*

The First Reader

The Sabbath Is Forever

In Edgar Allan Poe's well known story, "The Purloined Letter," a detective hero observes that the document in question has been in the most open and accessible place possible, because what is most apparent is generally disregarded and overlooked.

The Sabbath has probably been the most obvious manifestation of Judaism throughout the Jewish experience, from ancient times to the present. Yet it rarely receives the attention it deserves. The Symposium on the Sabbath in this issue is intended to redress the balance in some measure.

The opening paper, "The Sabbath — Cornerstone and Capstone of Jewish Life," by *Robert Gordis*, presents an appreciation of the Sabbath and its role in Jewish life and a defense of its traditional character. *Cyrus H. Gordon* discusses "The Biblical Sabbath: Its Origin and Observance in the Ancient Near East" as a basis for its role in Judaism.

Looking backward, *Uri Gordon* describes "A Sabbath at Grandfather's," while the rich variety of Sabbath customs and practices is illustrated in *Marc D. Angel's* "Sephardic Shabbat," and *Elliot K. Ginsburg's* "The Sabbath in the Kabbalah."

The Sabbath tradition, which modern Jews have inherited from ancient and medieval times, has, of course, been interpreted and utilized differently in this age of religious pluralism by the various trends in contemporary Jewish life. An Orthodox appreciation of the Sabbath is presented by *Chaim I. Waxman* in his paper "The Sabbath as Dialectic: The

Meaning and Role.” *Seymour Siegel* discusses “The Sabbath and Conservative Judaism.” “Reform’s Concern With The Sabbath” is the subject of a paper by *W. Gunther Plaut*. The specific approach of the youngest movement in religious Judaism is presented in “The Sabbath and Reconstructionism” by *Jacob J. Staub*. *Israel Knox*, in his paper, “Jewish Secularism and the Sabbath,” maintains that secular “cultural” Judaism has had little success in reinterpreting and preserving any significant features of the Sabbath in the life of its devotees.

That the maintenance of the Sabbath as a meaningful and life-enhancing feature for Jews in the twentieth century is fraught with major problems is clear from the concluding papers in this symposium. *Phillip Sigal*, writing from a highly individualistic standpoint, and with the American environment as his focus of concern, presents a stimulating discussion entitled “Toward a Renewal of Sabbath Halakhah.” The issues arising in the new burgeoning community in the State of Israel are discussed by *Pinchas Peli* in “Shabbat — A Key to Spiritual Renewal in Israel,” while *Theodore Friedman* considers “The Sabbath in Israel: Law and Life.” It is clear from these papers that the Sabbath, like all of life, is still unfinished business.

The Theme is Everlasting

One of the most powerful and perdurable of symbolic events in Judaism is the Biblical account of the *Akedah*, “the binding of Isaac,” in Genesis, Chapter 22. The narrative of the trial imposed by God upon Abraham and the near-sacrifice of his son, Isaac, has inspired Jewish martyrs to die for their faith throughout ancient and medieval times. In the modern age, religious faith has been radically weakened, if not destroyed, for many. Nevertheless, the symbol of the *Akedah* has lost little of its potency. It has, however, often been radically transformed in modern Jewish literature, particularly in the wake of the Holocaust.

In a wide-ranging paper, “Biblical Myth and Contemporary Experience: The *Akedah* in Modern Jewish Literature,” *Michael Brown* analyzes the various permutations that the age-old Biblical tradition has undergone in contemporary literature.

Steps Toward Understanding

In recent years, the Holocaust has been moving into Jewish consciousness with ever increasing force, at times with devastating power. Among Christians, sensitivity to the Holocaust and its implications for religion and human relations has been noticeably slower, though it is

gaining in momentum. A few valiant spirits, both in Catholicism and Protestantism, are now working in an effort to arouse the consciousness and the conscience of Christians to the most monstrous crime in recorded history.

In addition, the effort has also been undertaken to explore the implications of the Holocaust for theology. A leader in this movement has been Paul van Buren whose new book, "Discerning the Way: A Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality" is the subject of a review essay by *David Novak*.

R.G.

In deepest sorrow we announce the untimely passing of our devoted
administrative assistant

Trudy Kramberg

She served JUDAISM with exemplary dedication for a decade.

יהי זכרה ברוך

The Sabbath – Cornerstone and Capstone of Jewish Life

ROBERT GORDIS

IT IS A HIGHLY QUESTIONABLE PROCEDURE, if not a downright hazardous one, to select one practice, belief or institution from the rich and variegated pattern of Judaism and declare it to be the foundation of the entire structure. If, nevertheless, one feature of Judaism were to be so designated, the Sabbath might well qualify, since it is basic to Jewish faith and observance, irreplaceable in the life of the individual and indispensable for the life of the community. Like the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17:11) the Sabbath is an *’ot brit*, a mark of the covenant between God and Israel. Unlike circumcision, however, it is not a one-time event, but a perpetually self-renewing act in the life of every man, woman and child.

The uniqueness of the Sabbath is highlighted by its inclusion in the Decalogue, which appears both in Exodus and Deuteronomy. It is the only ritual practice included among the Ten Commandments, but is far more than ritual. In Exodus, the Sabbath is ordained on the seventh day as a recapitulation of God’s resting after completing the work of creation. “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day: therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Ex:20:11). In Deuteronomy, its purpose is to recall both the bondage in Egypt and Israel’s liberation from slavery, and to identify the Jew with the enslaved and the oppressed: “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work. . . .” (Deut. 5:13,15). Thus, as the *Kiddush* makes explicit, the Sabbath brings into the work and worry of daily life two motifs, the cosmic (“a memorial to the work of creation”), and the social (“a memorial to the Exodus from Egypt”).

In addition, every human being, Jew and non-Jew, young and old, slave and free, must be free to sense the presence of God and become sensitive to the needs of his fellow man.

The position of the Sabbath as the fourth commandment in the Decalogue is also highly significant. It serves as a bridge between the *mizvot bein adam lamakom*, “the commandments between man and God” which precede and the *mizvot bein adam lehavero*, “the commandments between man and his neighbor,” which follow. While the Sabbath links memory and hope, recalling creation, which took place in the beginning, and the redemption of mankind, which is to be consummated in the future, its gaze is firmly fixed on the present. The Sabbath ordains that all human beings, indeed, all living creatures, have a right to rest as part of

their regular life pattern. In addition, every human being, Jew and non-Jew, young and old, slave and master must be free to sense the presence of God and become sensitive to the needs of his fellow man.

One of the conventional myths of our culture is that "Athens is the cradle of democracy." The statement is constantly being repeated, in spite of the fact that thirty to sixty percent of the Greek population during the Golden Age were slaves, toiling for their Greek owners. The philosopher Aristotle was no less conscious than the Torah that the full development of human personality requires leisure, a break in the pattern of unremitting toil. On the basis of this recognition, he defended the institution of slavery in ancient Greece. Aristotle's argument was simple. Only the toil of many slaves would make it economically possible for a select elite to enjoy the leisure that they needed for the full development of their intellectual and creative potential. On the other hand, the Torah, basing itself on the same premise that leisure is essential to the full flowering of the human spirit, came to an altogether different conclusion — that all men had an inalienable right to Sabbath rest.

This insight is carried considerably further in Biblical law. To be sure, slavery was not formally abolished in ancient Israel. This was an impossibility in that world, where production was primitive and inefficient, so that the only economic system that was technologically viable was slavery. Nevertheless, the Torah created an elaborate system of legislation which all but abolished the enslavement of Hebrews by their own kinsmen. The Hebrew slave could serve only for a period of six years, after which he was to be set free, thus becoming in effect an indentured worker rather than a slave. The slave was protected against physical violence from his master; if he was injured he went free.

Yet, in spite of all ameliorating provisions designed to protect the slave, the basic opposition of the Torah to human bondage is clear. It reached its apogee in the provision: "You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you; he shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place which he shall choose within one of your towns, where it pleases him best; you shall not oppress him" (Deut. 23: 16, 17).

The Sabbath, which established the inalienable human right to rest and leisure, has served as the starting point for such elements of modern life as regular vacations, the radical reduction in the number of hours of work per week, the sabbatical year in academia, and the all-but-universal provision for old-age retirement. No wonder that the famous Canadian physician, Sir William Osler, declared that the Sabbath was the greatest Jewish contribution to civilization.

Because of its importance, the Biblical Sabbath underwent an elaborate process of interpretation and legislation in rabbinic law. Many of the provisions in the Mishnah and the Gemara were designed not only to prevent engaging in a gainful occupation on the Sabbath, but to limit physical activity of a non-economic character, like travelling or carrying.

Other provisions of rabbinic law had the goal of socializing the day and expanding the opportunities for enjoying the leisure that it brought in its wake. They declared: "You sanctify the Sabbath (the verb is noteworthy!) by food, drink and clean garments, and giving yourself pleasure (Midrash *Esther Rabba*, Ch. 7). To these physical pleasures, later generations added an afternoon nap as an extra-curricular feature. The Sabbath is to be divided equally between God and man, "Half to God and half for yourselves." The Rabbis also declared: "The Sabbath is handed over (*mesurah*) to you, and you are not handed over to the Sabbath" (B *Yoma* 25b and *Mekhilla, Ki Tissa* [Exodus 31:14]). This declaration, be it noted, was made by men who were committed with heart and soul to total Sabbath observance. The prescribed Sabbath worship and the study of Torah on the Sabbath constitute the service of God, to be sure, but they were equally a source of ineffable joy to man.

The extensive rabbinic concern with the day of rest made the tractate *Shabbat* the largest among the volumes of the Talmud, and it is reflected in hundreds of utterances on the subject throughout the Talmud and the Midrash.

During the long centuries of exile and persecution, Jewish observance was widespread, if not universal. It was the Sabbath that transformed each poverty-stricken inhabitant of the ghetto into Israel, the prince of God. It served as a mountain of strength and hope that sustained the Jew during the six days of the working week. It brought him not only strength but joy, because he knew that the Sabbath endowed him with *neshamah yeterah* "an additional soul." The tribulations and perils of daily existence were powerless to destroy his love of life as a Jew. The Morning Service each weekday could begin with the joyous affirmation, "Happy are we, how goodly our lot, how beautiful our heritage, how sweet our destiny."

The two great religions deriving from Judaism, Christianity and Islam, took over the concept of the Sabbath and embodied it in the Christian Sunday and the Islamic Friday, the days of public worship in their respective traditions. But the break with the Jewish Sabbath was never complete in Christianity. Many early Christians observed what they called "the first Sabbath" as well as "the second Sabbath," namely Saturday and Sunday each week (see *Luke* 6:1). Through the centuries, various Christian sects like the Seventh Day Adventists continued to be Sabbatarians, observing the Saturday as the day of rest, and incorporating into it many of the features of the Jewish Sabbath.

The English Puritans, on both sides of the Atlantic, who have been described as "Old Testament Christians," included such basic features as cessation from work and the study of Scripture into their Sunday observance. I know of no more moving description of the traditional Sabbath rest in Christian circles than George Gissing's reminiscences of a Scottish Presbyterian Sunday in "The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft." Re-

cently, the British film, "Chariots of Fire," highlighted the career of a dedicated Scottish athlete, Eric Liddell, who refused to run on a Sunday in the Olympic games in Paris in 1924. However, if I may borrow a phrase from our contemporary advertising: "The Sabbath has been imitated, but never duplicated." By and large, Christianity and Islam incorporated into their respective Sabbaths the features of public worship and, to a lesser degree, the cessation of gainful labor. But the Jewish *Oneg Shabbat*, the joy of the Sabbath, generally eluded them. Hence, many were more conscious of the burdens of the day than of its blessings.

In modern times, as Jews in central and western Europe and America surrendered the pattern of Jewish observance, the Sabbath was often the first casualty. Most of those who broke with the traditional Sabbath regimen originally did so because of economic necessity or social convenience. Before long, rationalization reinforced practice — or the lack of it. Many tended to challenge the Sabbath prohibitions of the traditional code as unduly restrictive and inappropriate to the modern age. Some influential voices were raised in Reform Judaism, advocating the transfer of the Sabbath worship to Sunday. To be sure, this trend did not long survive, though vestigial remains may still be detected here and there. There was a wide consensus that the manifold restrictions on activity enjoined by traditional Judaism were outmoded, cumbersome and unnecessary. The "negative" elements of the Sabbath, it was maintained, should be discarded, and only the "positive" elements, abstaining from one's gainful occupation, and participating in public worship, should be retained.

I hope that I shall be forgiven for injecting a personal note here. Many years ago, when the great Henry Hurwitz was the editor of the *Menorah Journal*, I promised to write a piece for him, entitled *Apologia Pro Sabbato Meo*, "A Defense of My Sabbath." Whether because of indolence or for more respectable reasons, the paper was not written, but I clearly remember my two basic theses.

First, the essence of the Sabbath is safeguarded by its so-called "negative" and restrictive prohibitions, without which its "positive" features ultimately wither and disappear. The white table cloth on Friday evening, the lighting of Sabbath candles and the recital of the Kiddush at the Friday evening family meal are all highly laudable, indeed, indispensable elements of the Sabbath. They have the power to redeem an hour or two from the work-a-day secular order. As a first step toward Sabbath observance, they cannot be too strongly encouraged. But, of themselves, they cannot do duty for the full day of rest and achieve the re-creation of the human personality.

Second, on purely rational grounds, the traditional Sabbath makes more sense in the modern world than it did in many past generations. Consider the life-style of my grandfather in Eastern Europe before World War I. As a scholar and teacher in his village, he was occupied all week with the study of the Talmud and its commentaries, the Codes and the

Responses. Came the Sabbath day, and for recreation he turned again to the Torah and the Talmud! For his modern descendants, however, the picture is radically changed. By and large we modern Jews are not exhausted by physical exertions during our work week. Few of us dig tunnels, unload cargoes, mine coal, man steel furnaces or operate heavy machinery. We do not go to work by trudging many miles on foot. We have at our disposal the amenities of the automobile, caught in traffic jams, or commuter trains invariably crowded and late, or the buses and subways, of which the less said the better. By the end of the week our muscles are not physically fatigued; instead, our nerves are frayed. Not toil, but tension, is the toll that modern life exacts from us and from our contemporaries. We need rest and surcease, not so much from physical strain as from psychic stress built up during the week.

It is precisely the traditional Sabbath that speaks to our present condition, by enjoining the avoidance of travel, shopping, cooking and writing, and by limiting our movements to what we can do with our own power, by walking. What the Prayer Book beautifully describes as *menuhah shelemah*, "total rest", is only within the power of the traditional Sabbath to bestow. As tensions continue to mount in contemporary society, the traditional Sabbath, that requires an all-but-total separation from work-a-day tasks and concerns and worry, becomes an ever more precious resource for life in a world increasingly dedicated to death.

Moreover, every individual does not live in a vacuum, and much of the present tragedy of our age derives from the fruitless effort of men and women to live alone, for and by themselves. A human being flourishes best, not in isolation, but within the ambience of a community, particularly one small and intimate enough to be concerned with each of its members. The community that meets these specifications is the family. Tragically, much in our contemporary life style is designed to drive members of the family apart, leaving them no common *locus standi*. The Sabbath day, with its accent on the family meal and common worship, serves to overcome these centrifugal forces of modern society, and give to the individual a heightened sense of worth, the conviction that there are others to whom he matters, who share his joys and griefs because they love him.

Obviously, there are needs and desires that cannot be satisfied within the parameters of the traditional Sabbath code. Such activities as athletics, physical exercise, visits to distant family and friends, attendance at theatres, operas and concerts and other public functions have a legitimate claim upon our interests and energies. In the State of Israel, where the six day week is universal, the existence of these legitimate needs collides with traditional Sabbath observance and creates major problems that have thus far not been faced, let alone solved. But, in the United States and elsewhere in the West, the five-day week is widely in vogue, so that Sunday is available for such activities. Perhaps in this way Christianity can repay in part the debt that it owes to the Jewish Sabbath!

I have stressed the significance of the Sabbath for the physical and psychic re-creation of each man, woman and child, because the impact of the Sabbath on the life of the individual is fundamental. But equally important is the role of the Sabbath in preserving Jewish group loyalty. The work-a-day secular world is engaged in homogenizing the diverse elements of the population. It offers little or no scope for Jewish sentiment, Jewish study or Jewish thought. It is the Sabbath that affords the opportunity and the means of expressing and deepening Jewish group consciousness, and, what is equally important, giving it positive and creative expression. Protest meetings against Soviet oppression, fund-raising activities for basic Jewish causes in Israel and throughout the world, demonstrations against the rising tide of anti-Semitism — all are, unfortunately, necessary concomitants of Jewish life in the twentieth century. But they cannot build positive Jewish experiences. The Sabbath focuses upon the joyful, self-fulfilling aspects of Jewish living, through physical rest, religious worship, good food and drink, the companionship of family and friends and the study of Torah.

Aḥad Ha-am's famous encomium on the Sabbath has been quoted, and rightly, time and again. "More than Israel has kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept Israel." But Aḥad Ha-am, who had given up the traditional Jewish regimen in his personal life, had his gaze upon the past. The Rabbis of the Talmud were concerned with the future! "If all Jews were properly to observe two Sabbaths in succession, Israel would be immediately redeemed" (B. *Shabbat* 118b).

The past is gone, the future yet unborn. What we possess is the present. We cannot win all Jews to Sabbath observance today, but we can begin with ourselves, and thus initiate the process of self-renewal and self-redemption.

"They that keep the Sabbath and call it a delight shall rejoice in Thy kingdom; the people that hallow the seventh day, even all of them shall be satiated and delighted with Thy goodness, seeing that Thou didst find pleasure in the seventh day, and didst hallow it; Thou didst call it the desirable of days, in remembrance of the creation" (From the Friday evening *Zemirot*).

The Biblical Sabbath: Its Origin and Observance in the Ancient Near East

CYRUS H. GORDON

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN WESTERN SCHOLARS looked upon the Hebrews and the Greeks as very ancient peoples. But, largely as a result of archaeological discoveries, perspectives have changed. Written evidence makes the historical Israelites and Hellenes about a millennium and a half younger than their literate neighbors in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Consequently, we no longer view Israel and Greece as people catapulted instantaneously from barbarism to high civilization, but, rather, as inspired groups who, alone of the ancient Near East nations, created, out of their rich international background, cultures and values that were head and shoulders above those of their predecessors and contemporaries.

Our topic is the Sabbath. Many, if not all, of the ancient Near East peoples, including the Egyptians and Greeks, had days of rest when normal labor was restricted or forbidden. But no nation except the Hebrews developed such a day into a dynamic and lasting religious and social institution comparable with the Sabbath. It is not from Greece or Rome, nor from Babylonia or Egypt, but from the Bible that countless laborers on every continent enjoy a day of rest. Christianity, to be different, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday; yet the idea of the Biblical day of rest stems from the Old Testament, starting with the creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3, and is enjoined in both versions of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15), albeit for different reasons. The data for the Biblical Sabbath are, thus, in the Bible. The extra-Biblical background for the study of sabbatical origins is of considerable intellectual interest but is merely the *pre*-history of the Biblical Sabbath.

For the cultural anthropologist, the Sabbath fits into the category of "restrictive days" when types of activity are forbidden. Many ancient Near East peoples celebrated such days. Not all of the reasons for restrictive days are religious. Market days are most effective when other businesses are closed down and the public is free to shop. Accordingly, even in ancient Israel, in certain periods the people would flock to Jerusalem on the Sabbaths and new moons to buy and sell. Nehemiah (13:15-21) bolstered the clergy in forbidding the profanation of the Mosaic Sabbath by all kinds of economic activity, including marketing, but the fact remains that using the day of rest as a market day has always been wide-

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spread. Ezra and Nehemiah (like many Jewish leaders before and since) insisted that Judaism had to be different.

The Sabbath is the only day of the week that is blessed and sanctified by God (Genesis 2:3). Yet, if we put restrictive days into context, they fall into the category of “unlucky days.” Hesiod, in his *Works and Days*, is the first European author to list lucky days when one should engage in normal activities, and unlucky days when one should not. In this framework, days of rest are “unlucky days.” But Hesiod is by no means the first non-Biblical author to deal with “lucky” and “unlucky” days. We have lists of such days inscribed on Babylonian tablets long before *Works and Days* or any part of the Bible was written.

Mesopotamia affords the richest documentation for the background of the Sabbath. Like most of the ancient Near Easterners (including the Hebrews), the Babylonians had a lunar calendar. Chronological as well as local conditions affected the various lists of restrictive days. The fact is that the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first and twenty-eighth days of the month were restrictive, though more so in the later Assyrian period (first half of the first millennium) than in the earlier Hammurapi Age (first half of the second millennium). However, the most restrictive of days was the nineteenth, which is not a multiple of seven. Much has been written about the resemblance of the Babylonian *Shapattu* and the Hebrew *Shabbat*. The *Shapattu* is the fifteenth day of the month. The comparison should not be buried in silence, but neither should it be exaggerated.

The heptadic system runs through the entire Near East but nowhere is it more pervasive than in Hebrew society. In the Bible, there are seven days in the week. Shavuot is a “week of weeks.”¹ The sacred month with the so-called New Year, the Ten Penitential Days ending in Yom Kippur, and finally in the Succot pilgrimage festival,² is the seventh one. Years are grouped into sabbatical cycles of seven, culminating in the seventh or Sabbatical Year when the entire Land is to rest and lie fallow. Seven sabbatical cycles make a Jubilee Cycle of forty-nine years, climaxed by the fiftieth or Jubilee Year.

The heptadic system is also found outside the Bible for reckoning time: years as well as days. Again, the documentation is richest in Mesopotamia. The torrential rains of the Babylonian Flood pour down for six days. When the Flood waters subside on the seventh,³ Utnapishtim (= the Babylonian Noah) offers twice-seven sacrifices to the gods.⁴ There

1. That is, “ $7 \times 7 = 49$.” The Hebrews and their ancient neighbors liked to climax “ \times ” with “ $\times + 1$ ”; thus “49” is climaxed by “50.” The English for Shavuot is “Pentecost,” derived from the Greek word for “50.”

2. This pilgrimage festival was so special (for there are two others — Passover and Pentecost —) that, in the Mishnah *he-hag* “The Pilgrimage” refers only to Succot (note already Nehemiah 10:34.) Hebrew *hag* is cognate with Arabic *hajj* “pilgrimage.”

3. Lines 126-129 of tablet 11 (= the Flood Epic) of the Gilgamesh Epic (translated by E.A. Speiser in J.B. Pritchard’s *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955] pp. 72-99).

4. *Ibid.*, line 157.

are still other illustrations in the Gilgamesh Epic: Enkidu demonstrates his sexual prowess with the girl Shamhat for six days and seven nights.⁵ Bread is given to the sleeping Gilgamesh on each of his six days of slumber from which he awakes on the seventh.⁶ Seven years of famine are to follow the slaying of Gilgamesh.⁷

Egypt provides further examples. Suffice it to mention here that there is an Egyptian text dealing with a seven-year famine recalling the seven-year famine foreshadowed by Pharaoh's dream of the seven lean kine.⁸

The Ugaritic texts, which have revolutionized the study of Hebrew language and literature, are permeated with the theme of "sevenness." The Epic military march of King Kret takes seven days.⁹ Epic rejoicing or grief both require seven days or years.¹⁰ There is, to be sure, a difference between literary documents and cultic practice. It is, therefore, of special interest that Ugaritic tablet no. 3,¹¹ is a cultic prescription calling for sacrifices on certain days of some month. It also spells out the ritual for various days designated by number up to and including the seventh. Thereafter, only the day of the new moon is specified. This suggests that already at Ugarit of the Late Bronze Age (more precisely, between 1400 and 1200 B.C.E.), there were pagans in Canaan who, like the Hebrews, attached religious importance to the seventh day and to the new moon.

The seven-day week in the modern world is firmly rooted in the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3. Among the pagans the days of the week were named after heavenly bodies. Sunday is named for the Sun; Monday, for the Moon; Mardi (French for "Tuesday"), for Mars; Mercredi (French for "Wednesday"), for Mercury; Jeudi (French for "Thursday"), for Jove = Jupiter; Vendredi (French for "Friday"), for Venus; and Saturday, for Saturn. The reason for using the French instead of the English names from Tuesday to Friday, is that the English has substituted Teutonic equivalents for the more familiar Latin names.

The Hebrews rejected the pagan designations of the first six days of the week, named as they were after heavenly bodies who were worshipped as deities by their idolatrous neighbors. Instead, they assigned numbers from one to six, to Sunday through Friday. Similarly, the author of the first chapter of Genesis mentions the two "great luminaries" in order to

5. Tablet 1, column 3, line 21.

6. Tablet 11, lines 208-219.

7. Tablet 6, lines 103-113.

8. The Egyptian text of "The Tradition of Seven Lean Years in Egypt," is translated by J. Wilson in Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 31-32. The Hebrew narrative is in Genesis 41:1-36.

9. Translated by C.H. Gordon, "Poetic Legends and Myths from Ugarit," *Berytus* 25, 1977: 5-133; see pp. 40, 41, 44.

10. Actually six, with the climactic departure of the performers on the seventh. See "Poetic Legends and Myths from Ugarit," pp. 12-13, 27.

11. The tablet is transliterated by C.H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), pp. 159-160.

avoid using the words for Sun and Moon. No one will for a moment imagine that the Biblical author did not know the Hebrew words *shemesh* "sun" and *yareah* "moon." But it happens that Shemesh and Yareah were major gods in the Canaanite pantheon, and the author did not feel right about making God responsible for the creation of what might verbally be taken to mean two popular pagan deities. By the same token, the author of Genesis 1:1-2:3 does not call the Holy Day "Sabbath," but the "Seventh Day." We are confronted with a process that theologians call "demythologization" because, as we shall see, the word *shabbat* ("Sabbath") has astrological connections.

Not all mythology is equally objectionable. For example, Tehom, "The Deep," is an old pagan dragon representing the Sea. In the Babylonian Creation Epic, Tiamat (= Tehom + feminine suffix) is slain by Marduk who splits her in two, fashioning the heavens from one half.¹² Since Tehom had given rise to no cult that might rival God's cult in Israel, Tehom could be left in the text (Genesis 1:2). But Shemesh and Yareah were worshipped as important deities. We need not turn, for supporting evidence, to the abundant art and literature of the ancient Near East. We need only mention Biblical place names like Beth-Shemesh¹³ and Jericho.¹⁴ While there is no way of saying "Sunday" in Hebrew except "First Day" or "Monday" except "Second Day" and so forth through "Friday" except "Sixth Day," we normally call the Sabbath *shabbat* or *yom ha-shabbat* ("the day of the Sabbath"). In the Ten Commandments we are ordered to remember (or keep¹⁵) the Sabbath holy.

The Genesis account of creation has demythologized "Sabbath" for the same reason that it has circumvented the pagan astral divinities in the nomenclature of the first six days. It happens that Shabbetai is the Hebrew for the god "Saturn," whose name persists in English "Saturday." We must, accordingly, ask ourselves why we cling to the name of Shabbat(ai) "Saturn" in designating the seventh day, whereas we have eliminated completely "Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jove/Jupiter and Venus" from the Hebrew names of the week-days. The answer is that Shabbetai "Saturn" had a special meaning for Israel. Tacitus (*Histories* 2:5) records the tradition that the Jews had long ago been dislocated when Saturn was deposed and supplanted by his son, Jupiter. Having a special relationship to Saturn (the old king of the gods), the Jews suffered a serious upset when their patron deity was deposed. The Jews will always remain the historical people, *par excellence*, of the Sabbath. Prehistory tells us that this

12: Tablet 4, lines 137-138. The Creation Epic is translated by Speiser in Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 60-72.

13. In Joshua 19:38 and Judges 1:33, Beth-Shemesh ("House of the Sun God") is listed with Beth-Anath ("The House of the Goddess Anath"). Beth-El ("The House of the God El") is the same type of place-name.

14. The transparent root of *Yereho* "Jericho" is YRH from which *yareah*, "moon," is derived.

15. So in Deuteronomy 5:2, as against "remember" in Exodus 20:8.

distinction harks back to the time when sabbatarians were the protégés of Shabbetai/Saturn.

There has always been tension between austere monotheism and the aesthetic appreciation of God's wondrous creation. We do not have to go beyond the Bible to find both admiration of God's heavenly host¹⁶ and condemnation of any respect shown thereto.¹⁷ Some see no harm in paying tribute to God's handiwork, while others make a case for insisting that such tribute is the gateway to paganism if it is not, indeed, paganism itself. From the large number of synagogues with zodiac mosaics in Roman-Byzantine Palestine, we know that astrology had been worked into Judaism. Some of the rabbis tolerated it, but the more austere ones who opposed it, prevailed; so much so, that when the synagogue mosaics began to emerge from the soil in our own twentieth century, they came as a great surprise.

It was a common belief that each nation was under the special influence of a particularly heavenly body and the prevailing school of rabbis did not question this general principle; they denied only that Israel was subject to astrological influence. The primary meaning of *eyn mazzal le-Yisrael* "Israel has no constellation/star"¹⁸ is that the Jews, unlike the Gentiles, are subject only to God, and are immune to astrological forces.

Such are some of the factors that emerge when we probe into the pre-Hebraic origins of the Sabbath. At the risk of being repetitious, it must be stressed that the significant aspect of the Sabbath is not its pagan prehistory, but the spiritual and practical content that Israel infused into it.

I must confess (and there must be many dedicated Jews and Christians who could join me in this confession) that I am glad that Biblical scholarship does not stop with the sacred, the good and the right. One of my teachers, the late Professor Max Margolis, once remarked that he would give a lot to recover the lost books of Israel's false prophets. To understand the Bible we must know not only what it enjoins, but also what it condemns. Josephus was so ashamed of the incident of the Golden Calf that he omitted it from his Greek account of Jewish *Antiquities*. He did not want to call to the attention of his Greek readers such an egregious lapse on the part of Israel, whose pure monotheism (devoid of idolatry) he wished to convey to the Gentiles. Well, I would give a lot to learn more about the cult of the Golden Calf. The reader should not hold this confession against me for the simple reason that the Golden Calf, the Baal cult, etc. are now dead issues. The Sabbath will always remain a living issue in Judaism. But Shabbetai is as much a dead issue in Judaism today, as Saturn is to our Christian neighbors.

16. Job 9: 8–10; Psalm 136:1–9; etc.

17. Clearly stated in both versions of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8) to reverberate constantly (e.g., 2 Kings 23:5).

18. Said by Rabbi Yohanan (in opposition to Rabbi Hanina) according to Babylonian Talmud, *Sabbath*, p. 156 a and b (Vilna edition, 1902).

A Sabbath at Grandfather's

URI GORDON

A CHAIN OF GENERATIONS PASSES BEFORE us from Mount Sinai up to today, and each generation has its Sabbath image. Mine started when I was a young child and went to stay for Sabbath with grandfather.

Until that time, the Sabbath had been, for me, a day for enjoyment, a day without lessons, a day of rest, a day when candles were lit, which added color and happiness to the life of the young lad that I was, and a day when mummy and daddy were entirely at my disposal. But I didn't give any thought to the significance of the day until the visit that I want to tell about. That visit is well engraven in my memory in all its details and it seems as if it will accompany me for many years.

My late grandfather was a religious man and broadminded. In the past he had not pressed me to go to synagogue, but, on this visit, for some reason, he argued that I should join him for prayer. So it was that, as we were getting dressed in our best clothes, he started to talk to me about the Sabbath. He asked, "What do you know, Uri, about the Sabbath?" I was surprised at the question, and answered, "A day of rest." "For whom?" he continued. "For all the world, or for only the Jews?"

I did not grasp his meaning fully. I did not understand the distinction between all the world and the Jewish people, but, of course, I said to him that the Jewish people have the Sabbath and, as for the non-Jews, I really didn't know. Grandfather then began to tell me about the Sabbath, and said what I can still hear clearly today. "The Jewish people have a wonderful creation that belongs only to them, a holy and sublime day, the Sabbath queen." Slowly I was introduced to another world, a world of proverbs and ideas, and I thirsted to hear his words about the Sabbath.

As we walked to the synagogue he related in his own way that the Sabbath and the Jewish people can be seen as two lovers whose souls are intertwined. The legend relates, "Said the Sabbath before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Master of the Universe, everyone has a partner, but I have no partner.' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to her, 'The congregation of Israel is your partner.'"

Grandfather continued to talk about the holiness of the Sabbath, and he noted that the Sabbath also says, "The life of a Jew takes precedence over me and my honor, for if a Jew should fall ill, whoever runs to profane me is praised." And Israel says, "I forego my life before the honor of the Sabbath, for whoever profanes the Sabbath is to be put to death." Grand-

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father also quoted, "And the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath for all time, an eternal covenant." As I listened I became excited at the unfamiliar ideas and images and at the slight tremble in his voice as he spoke about the sanctity of the Sabbath.

We finally reached the synagogue, a mere hut, and not some grand, magnificent building. A small hut into which people were crammed, all in their festive attire, all of them radiating happiness, with much hope in the air. A man stood up, wearing a tallit, the significance of which grandfather explained to me in a whisper. A moment passed, and another, and suddenly the man intoned, "Come, let us exult before the Lord, let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation." As I held the prayer book in my hands, grandfather directed me, and turned the pages for me, and the eyes of my soul were lifted up to another world that I had never known. Songs resounded with strength and emotion and the singers sang as if they were far away with their thoughts. Children were praying next to their parents and relatives. Some swayed with their bodies in a devotion which brought a smile to my lips. "Why do they do that?" I asked grandfather. He whispered, "Later, later I'll explain," as he, too, continued swaying like the others.

The prayers came to an end. "*Shabbat shalom*" grandfather called out to his acquaintances, and continued homeward, with no time for small talk. He was all holiness. He explained to me that one of the more important customs of the Sabbath is for people to greet one another with the words *Shabbat Shalom*. On the way grandfather explained why the people sway back and forth when they pray. He said, "Once a famous rabbi was asked that same question, and he replied, 'The people of Israel want to save themselves. Their problems and troubles are many. The same way that a drowning man in the sea strikes out with his hands and feet and his whole body shakes and moves, so is it when we pray for the peace of our people.' We are trying to save our souls and we sway back and forth with our bodies like that man in the rough sea." I fully understood the analogy and I found myself smiling.

We arrived home, finally. The long, familiar old table was laid, but that day it seemed somehow different, holier. Everything was different than in the past: the heart warming melody, "Peace unto you ministering angels, angels of the Most High," the melody from Proverbs, "A woman of valor, who can find?," the sanctification of the wine, everything seemed different.

Grandfather said, "And the heaven and the earth were finished and all their host." He concluded the blessing with "... and He took pleasure in us, and in love and favor gave us His holy Sabbath as an inheritance, a memorial of the creation." The challot were cut and the gefilte fish were placed on the table. Again, a song filled the room.

Grandfather told about Sambation, the mythical river which ceases to flow on the Sabbath and does not throw up its large boiling stones. In my

mind I imagine myself strolling on the banks of the Sambation between the mountains and the many huge rocks. Grandfather continued to speak to all of his listeners, while he had his eyes fixed on me, and with a small smile of tranquility, he related, "It once happened, with a certain woman that every Sabbath, after she had prayed and read the weekly portion, she would sit alone in her house and spin in order not to sit with her neighbors and waste time on unimportant matters, scandal and gossip. One Sabbath, Elijah the Prophet was out and came to that woman's town. He saw a house over which the Presence hovered, and went in and found a woman seated and spinning. He said to her, 'My daughter, do you not know that it is the Sabbath today?' 'Yes,' she answered, 'I know that it is the Sabbath.' 'And do you not know that work is forbidden on the Sabbath?' he asked her. 'Yes, I know that work is forbidden on the Sabbath,' she replied. He said to her, 'Then why are you spinning?' 'What, then,' she said, 'do I have to do at this hour?' He said to her, 'You have to pray and read the weekly portion.' She said, 'I have already done that.' He said to her, 'Sit with your neighbors and do not profane the Sabbath.' So she got up, left her work and went to her neighbors.

"On the next Sabbath, Elijah saw that the Divine Presence had left that house. He went in and found the woman sitting with her neighbors and talking with them about weddings, about so-and-so who had made herself an expensive garment, and so-and-so whose husband had given her a pearl necklace, about the son of so-and-so who desired the daughter of so-and-so who, in turn, desired the son of so and so, and thus they were conversing with scandal and gossip. When Elijah the Prophet saw that, he said to her, 'My daughter, return to what you were doing and do not compound sin.'"

Grandfather claimed that the Sabbath should be devoted to matters of the spirit and the mind and not to the unimportant conversations that take up our time throughout the week. He added that even Moshe Rabbenu understood that it was fitting that the Sabbath be given to Israel on the Sabbath day. And why was this? For the children of Israel are troubled all week with day-to-day affairs, but on the Sabbath they rest and are peaceful and pure in their souls.

Time passed quickly and the small hours of the night approached. On the next day I would willingly go with grandfather to the synagogue and take in everything every word, every melody, every prayer. The thought that our forefathers had to fight hard in order to keep the Sabbath accompanied me to bed. I could not fall asleep. The Sambation in all its greatness was there in front of me, fearful and beautiful. In my imagination I could see King David praying on the Sabbath and thinking about the majesty and greatness of the Sabbath which I had suddenly seen and come to know.

Finally I did fall asleep, full of the experiences of Sabbath eve in my grandfather's town, a Friday evening when I was completely given over to

the magic world of Jewish thought, hasidic devotion, loyalty and a great burning faith. That night is engraved in my memory and will accompany me throughout my life. I have only to hear a hasidic melody to recall again the experience that opened up for me a new horizon, that is different and wider. The little that I know about Jewish religious custom, and the respect that I have for it, is due to that Friday night in grandfather's home.

Not long ago, in Jerusalem, on a Friday evening, a religious man passed me on his way to synagogue and saw me getting out of my car. He didn't shout *shabbos* at me or throw stones, but just said, "*Shabbat Shalom, Jew.*" And I felt that, if he had whipped me, I would have felt better. He just called out peacefully and quietly, "*Shabbat Shalom, Jew,*" and at that instant I could visualize myself sitting at my grandfather's table.

The Sambatyon at Rest

The roaring Sambatyon of life was at rest in the Ghetto; on thousands of squalid homes the light of Sinai shone. The Sabbath Angels whispered words of hope and comfort to the foot-sore hawker and the aching machinist, and refreshed their parched souls with celestial anodyne and made them kings of the hour, with leisure to dream of the golden chairs that awaited them in Paradise.

The Ghetto welcomed the Bride with proud song and humble feast, and sped her parting with optimistic symbolisms of fire and wine, of spice and light and shadow. All around, their neighbors sought distraction in the blazing public-houses, and their tipsy bellowings resounded through the streets and mingled with the Hebrew hymns. Here and there the voice of a beaten woman rose on the air. But no Son of the Covenant was among the revellers or the wife-beaters; they remained a chosen race, a peculiar people, redeemed at least from the grosser vices, a little human islet won from the waters of animalism by the genius of ancient engineers. For while the genius of the Greek or the Roman, the Egyptian or the Phoenician survives but in word and stone, the Hebrew word alone was made flesh (*Israel Zangwill*).

Sephardic Shabbat

MARC D. ANGEL

ON FRIDAY AFTERNOON, JUST BEFORE SUNSET, the mystics and pietists of 16th century Safed would go out to the fields and hills to greet the incoming Sabbath Queen. They would stand facing west as the sun receded from view. At the very moment when the sun set, they would close their eyes, clasp their hands together against their chests, and stand with fear and trembling as one stands before a king. At that moment they received the additional holiness of the Sabbath. And as they felt this holiness enter them, they would sing Psalm 29, beginning the service of receiving the Sabbath. They recited phrases to welcome the Sabbath bride, the Sabbath Queen.

Those Jews of Safed, most of whom were Sephardim, lived Shabbat both as a cosmic and as a personal experience. Watching the sun set, the sky aglow with colors and shadows, they could sense in some vague way the greatness of God, the creator of the universe. At the very same sunset on the sixth day of Creation, God had created the holiness of Shabbat. But if, on the one hand, those Jews felt the mood of awe at God's greatness, they also felt the personal joy in feeling the holiness enter their own lives. They invested Shabbat with a special personality. She was a bride, she was a queen, she was the source of love, comfort, unthreatening royalty.

Few Jews nowadays go out to the fields to greet the incoming Shabbat Queen, but all Jews who follow the traditional form of worship are influenced by the spirituality of that enigmatic and holy community of Sephardim of Safed. The universally chanted poem, *Lekha dodi*, was composed by a leading Sephardic figure of that period, Rabbi Shelomo Halevi Alkabetz. "Come, my beloved, to greet the bride, let us receive the presence of Shabbat." Many Jews follow the custom of standing up during the singing of this hymn, while others rise at the end of it. As the phrase, *Bo-i Kallah* is recited, most Jews bow, as if actually recognizing the presence of a royal visitor, while some turn around and face west at the recitation of these words. The spiritual insight developed in Safed thus continues in our synagogues today.

The perception of Shabbat as a bride received a special importance among the Sephardic Kabbalists, and certain customs which are prevalent in many Sephardic communities, and which are also popular among some Ashkenazic communities, can be traced back to that perception. For example, it is common among many Sephardim to sing the "Song of Songs" on Friday just before the evening service. This beautiful love poem

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has been interpreted as a description of the love between God and Israel, and it is sung as part of the general marriage theme uniting God and Israel, Israel and Shabbat.

It should be noted that the influence of the Sephardic Kabbalists of Safed was spread not only through their own writings and works, but also through the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria, the famous Ari Hakadosh. Though not himself Sephardic, he lived within the Sephardic milieu and both influenced, and was influenced by, his Sephardic colleagues and students.

Throughout the generations and wherever Jews lived, the Shabbat has played a central role in the religious life of their community. Objectively, the twenty-four hours of Saturday are no different from twenty-four hours of any other day of the week. To an observer who does not know Shabbat, Saturday is no different from any other day. But, subjectively, the Jew who observes Shabbat enters a new world, a new dimension of time. Those twenty-four hours are intrinsically different from all other periods of time. Shabbat is the special spiritual treasure of those who understand it and experience it; it is a sign of the private covenant between God and Israel. But it is invisible to everyone except those who keep the Shabbat.

Jewish law and custom prescribe that the Shabbat must be respected — by wearing nice clothes, by preparing special foods, by Torah study and prayer. Jews of all backgrounds have treated Shabbat as an extraordinary day. Whether they spoke Hebrew or Yiddish or Judeo-Spanish or Arabic; whether they ate *gefilte fish* and *cholent*, or *pescado con tomat* or *adafina* or whatever else; whether their Shabbat prayers and songs sounded Eastern European or Turkish or Arabic or whatever else — the central reality of Shabbat was true for all Jews.

Jews of all backgrounds who observe Shabbat have always been receptive to the spiritual insights and practices of Jews of communities other than their own. That is why the influence of the Sephardim of 16th century Safed has been so pervasive, and some of their less known contributions deserve to be more widely appreciated.

Sephardim have contributed notably to the poetic and musical dimension of Shabbat observance. As Jews throughout the world sit around their Sabbath tables singing *zemirot*, they benefit — knowingly or not — from the creations of Sephardic poets. For example, *Yah Ribbon Olam*, by Rabbi Israel Najara; *Bar Yohai*, by Shimon ibn Lavi; *Ki Eshmerah Shabbat*, by Abraham ibn Ezra; *Deror Yikra*, by Dunash ibn Labrat; *Yedid Nefesh*, by Rabbi Eliezer Azikri.

These poems — and many others like them — are significant for a number of reasons. They are evidence of the creativity which the Shabbat inspired. Moreover, they reflect the deep-seated need to enhance the observance of Shabbat with song. Not least significant are the recurrent themes which appear in almost all of them: the holiness of Shabbat, the

spiritual freedom which comes with this holiness, the longing for Messiah and redemption. These ideas and feelings have spread from the Sephardic poets to the Jewish people everywhere, and have helped shape the religious mind of the Jewish people. Shabbat without the creative efforts of Sephardic poets would seem stark and empty.

It is well-known that we are supposed to eat three meals in honor of Shabbat: one on Friday evening, another on Shabbat morning, and the third on Shabbat afternoon. Rabbi Eliezer Azikri, in his volume, *Sefer Hareidim*, explains that these meals are tied to the three major themes of Shabbat. Friday night relates to the Shabbat of Creation, when God had finished the work of creating the Universe. Shabbat morning relates to the Shabbat when the Torah was revealed on Mt. Sinai to the children of Israel, and Shabbat afternoon relates to the "world that is all Shabbat," the future messianic period. Just as the synagogue services at these three times reflect these themes, so do the Shabbat meals relate to them. On Friday evening, the Kiddush recalls Creation; on Shabbat morning, peoples' minds are attuned to Torah study; on Shabbat afternoon, just before the sun sets, we already begin to feel the Sabbath slipping away from us and we long for a world that is all Sabbath. The Sephardic Kabbalists attached a great importance to yet a fourth meal, one that is served after Shabbat has already left. This is known as the *Melaveh Malkah*, the escorting of the Queen. Just as the Shabbat Queen has been welcomed on Friday evening, so she is to be escorted on her departure.

The Sephardic observance of Shabbat included other elements, aside from those already discussed. A major factor was the communal nature of the day, and various practices popular among the Sephardim tended to strengthen a person's tie to his family and to his particular community. For example, on Friday mornings, there would be collections of food to be distributed to the poor. Jews who had sufficient food for themselves and their families would invite others, who were less fortunate, to join them for the Shabbat meals, and officials of the synagogue would collect bread for the poor.

Shabbat was a special day for visiting relatives and neighbors. In closely knit Sephardic communities, all Jews might consider themselves to be part of one large extended family, and hospitality and social grace were highlighted on Shabbat.

Synagogue services were, of course, conducted in the custom of the particular Sephardic communities. Although the prayer ritual is quite similar among all Sephardim, there were some local variations in text, and more variation in the particular style of music used for the service. Among Sephardim in the Spanish and Portuguese communities of Western Europe, the music was more westernized and the services were more formal, while among the Jews in Turkey there was a notable influence of Turkish music. Among the Jews in the Middle East and in North Africa, one could detect the musical influences from their native cultures.

Yet, for all the differences among the Sephardim, there are some universal features which deserve to be mentioned. Generally, the entire service is chanted aloud. Congregants read along with the Hazzan with enthusiasm. While Sephardic Hazzanim were expected to have pleasant voices, they were not seen to be primarily performers, since almost all of the service was chanted by the entire congregation. The Hazzan served, more or less, merely as the leader, but there were several points in the service where he could sing an elaborate passage by himself, and these sections were much enjoyed by the congregation. The Sephardic Hazzan was also expected to be an expert reader of the Sefer Torah and even if he had an excellent voice, he would not be excused for many mistakes in his reading. In Spanish and Portuguese congregations, the rabbis also were expected to read the Torah scroll expertly. Amateurs could not fulfill the obligation.

There were other customs in synagogue services which reflected aspects of the Sephardic personality. When a man was given an *aliyah*, his children and younger relatives stood in his honor and would remain standing until he finished his portion and returned to his seat. This custom imbued the younger family members with respect for their elders, and also had the effect of unifying an entire family. I recall when my grandfather, of blessed memory, was called to the Torah in our synagogue in Seattle, his children and grandchildren would all rise for him. There were quite a few of us and, as we stood up while the rest of the congregation remained seated, we could not help but feel the pride in our grandfather and our entire family. We all shared the glory of that moment and all felt the recognition of the community.

Another custom was that children and grandchildren would kiss the hands of their parents and grandparents in order to receive a blessing. This frequently would take place on Friday evening or during the day of Shabbat, although it also was done at other times, both in the synagogue and at home. When my grandfather, for example, would return to his seat after an *aliyah*, we would go to him and kiss his hand. He would then place his hand over our heads and give us each a blessing. This action had the effect of deepening our respect for him, of making us look to him for his blessing. It also gave him the satisfaction of blessing his children and grandchildren. The power of such a practice in strengthening the ties of members of a family is considerable.

An important word in the Sephardic vocabulary is the Hebrew term *kavod*. Literally, it means honor, but its significance goes beyond this simple translation. It includes ideas of self-respect, dignity, communal approval, a sense of one's own honor. *Kavod* was important to Sephardim on every day of the week, but on Shabbat it seemed to be even more important. Individuals would look forward to the opportunity of participating in the synagogue service in any way. They would take pride in their beautiful voices, or in the clear way in which they chanted. They

were anxious to perform one of the honors of opening the Ark, or carrying the Sefer Torah, or placing the ornamental bells (*rimonim*) on the Torah. In many communities, these honors were actually auctioned off to the highest bidders, a practice which still takes place in some synagogues. The custom had a two-fold advantage. First, it provided revenue for the congregation. Second, and at least equally important, it diminished the possibility of disputes among congregants. Since so many wanted to perform one of the honors, it would be difficult to decide who should have the right. By auctioning off the honors, however, the problem was solved. Naturally, the solution also had its own problems, but, in most cases, congregations seemed to have managed this system very well. When a person won the auction for a particular honor, he would often give it to someone else to perform, in a significant gesture of goodwill, friendship and respect. When an individual went to perform one of these honors or was called to the Torah, congregants would call out to him: *Be-khavod*, with honor. The synagogue service, thus, reinforced a person's individual self-respect as well as enhancing family ties.

Rabbi Hayyim Ben Attar, in his famous Biblical commentary, *Or Hahayyim*, explains that Shabbat is the basis of the Creation. On each Shabbat, God decides whether to continue the Creation for the next six days. When Jews observe Shabbat, they justify the continued existence of the world. If the Shabbat were not observed by anyone, the world would come to an end. Though this interpretation might be difficult to understand in a literal way, those who observe Shabbat can well understand it symbolically. Without the deep experience of Shabbat, it might just seem that the world as we know it has come to an end. Conversely, when we observe Shabbat, we feel ready to greet the next six days until the next Shabbat.

Sabbath Expenses

Thus taught Rabbi Tahlifa . . . , "Man's needs are all apportioned to him during the Ten Days of Penitence, except his expenditures for Sabbaths, festivals, and the teaching of the Torah to his children. If a man diminishes these expenditures, his income is diminished; and if he adds to them, his income is increased" (*Bezah* 15b-16a).

The Sabbath in the Kabbalah

ELLIOT K. GINSBURG

It would be no exaggeration to call the Sabbath the day of the Kabbalah. On the Sabbath, the light of the upper world bursts into the profane world in which man lives during the six days of the week. The light of the Sabbath endures into the ensuing week, growing gradually dimmer, to be relieved in the middle of the week by the rising light of the next Sabbath. It is the day on which a special *pneuma*, the Sabbath soul, enters into the believer, enabling him to participate in the right way in this day, which shares more than any other day in the secrets of the pneumatic world.

— Gershom Scholem¹

OVER A PERIOD OF SEVERAL CENTURIES, THE Kabbalists developed a rich body of lore and ritual that articulated a new vision of the Sabbath. Several outstanding examples of it are the reformulation of the Sabbath as a mystical marriage ceremony, extensive discussion of the “feminine” aspect within God, and an emphasis on the motif of human transformation marked by the devotee’s assimilation of the Sabbath-soul. Owing largely to the efforts of the 16th century Safed Kabbalists and their subsequent popularizers, the mystical understanding and celebration of the Sabbath was transmitted to, and assimilated by, virtually every Jewish community. In this essay I will discuss several of the central motifs of the Kabbalistic Sabbath, focusing on the mythic paradigms that lend emotional resonance to the day and the ritual that dramatizes it.

I. The Rabbinic and Kabbalistic Sabbaths: Some Contrasts

In order to orient readers not familiar with the Kabbalistic worldview and ethos, it seems useful to begin with a brief comparison of *mizvat Shabbat* among the Talmudic sages and the Kabbalists.

1. *For the Kabbalist, the proper observance of Shabbat affects the Cosmos and God’s inner life.* At the core of the Kabbalists’ “mythopaeic revision” of the Sabbath lies their unique understanding of the role of the Person (i.e., the Jew) and the function of the *mizvot*. Gershom Scholem has noted that the Kabbalistic worldview is at once *symbolic* and *magical*, resting on the belief that “everything is *in* everything else” and “everything *acts upon* every-

1. G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* [OKS] (New York, 1969) p. 137

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thing else.”² All worlds and levels of being are interrelated. Man is uniquely able to act upon and reflect the world of divinity by virtue of two properties: 1) his status as a Microcosm built in accord with the divine paradigm, and 2) his ability to establish a link with the Creator by means of the *mizvot*.

Here a comparison with the Rabbis is instructive. Rereading the Rabbinic saying that “the *mizvot* were given to humankind to *purify* [leZaReF] them,” the Kabbalists claimed that the *mizvot* were given to *bind* [leZaReF] persons to their Creator and to enable them to *bind together* the upper and lower worlds.³ Going far beyond the modest claims of the Sages, the Kabbalists held that the proper performance of the *mizvot* had cosmic impact: to fulfill a *mizvah* is to affect *its* divine correlate, to help restore harmony within divinity. Man thus serves as an ontological transformer. Standing at the end of the chain of emanation, he has the unique task and power to actualize the *mizvah*, to return the divine flow back to its source, and to serve as God’s partner in completing the Work of Creation.⁴

2. *The Kabbalists integrated myth into Rabbinic ritual.* It has been argued that many of the rituals of Rabbinic Judaism seem “strangely dry and sober,” devoid of a mythic substrate; they function primarily as rites of remembrance.⁵ A case in point is the fulfillment of *mizvat Shabbat*, held to commemorate events in *history*: the completion of Creation and the Exodus from Egypt. In the Kabbalists’ reading, however, *Ma’aseh Bere’shit* and *Yezi’at Mizrayim* symbolize a primordial process that is said to recur each Sabbath. The rituals of Sabbath always dramatize some event unfolding in the pneumatic world and enable the believer to participate in its mysteries.

Of course, I do not mean to suggest that the Rabbinic account of the Sabbath is devoid of mythopoeic qualities. We need only recall those Aggadot that hypostatize Sabbath as, e.g., a gift from God’s Treasury, as 1/60th of the World-to-Come, and, most significantly for the Kabbalists, as Bride and Queen.⁶ However, the Rabbis did not elaborate on these images, nor did they, in any fashion known to us, systematically correlate them with the Sabbath ritual. The Kabbalists, however, did so in a comprehensive fashion.

Moreover, while, for the Rabbis, most Aggadot took place at the juncture of the human and divine realms, the mystics saw the *intradivine* world as the primary Aggadic stage. Thus, as early as Nahmanides, the Aggadah relating the marriage of the Sabbath and the Community of

2. Ibid., p. 123.

3. See e.g., the discussion in E. Gottlieb, *Mehqarim beSifrut HaQabbalah* (Tel Aviv, 1974), pp. 32 ff.

4. For further discussion, see G. Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974) pp. 152 ff.

5. See OKS, p. 120 ff. Of course there are exceptions, cf. e.g., TB *Sabbath* 119 b, on “VaYekhulu”.

6. On this matter, see I. Tishby, *Mishnat HaZohar* [MZ] (Jerusalem, 1961), Vol. 2, “*Shabbat*”.

Israel is understood as a mystical marriage *within* God.⁷ It is *coincidentia oppositorum*, the union of the divine Sabbath (*Yesod*: the “male” aspect of divinity) with the supernal Community of Israel (*Malkhut*, or *Shekhinah*: the “feminine” aspect). In turn, the marriage of earthly Israel to the Sabbath day is seen as the outward manifestation, the symbol, of this intradivine process.

3. We have just alluded to a third significant difference between the Rabbinic and Kabbalistic understanding of Shabbat: *for the Kabbalists, “Sabbath” is identified with divinity*. The term connotes not only a day, but a configuration of *sefirot*, those ten symbolic potencies that chart and embody the dynamics of God’s inner life. For example, “Sabbath” may variously refer to *Yesod* or *Tiferet*, the “masculine” aspects of the divine totality; to *Binah*, called the “Great Sabbath”; or, most commonly, to the last *sefirah*, *Malkhut*. In its extended sense it may even refer to the seven bottom *sefirot* or to the *sefirotic* totality: “the mystery of the entire Faith.”⁸ Yet, amid the multiplicity of referents, one basic idea is telegraphed by the term: “Sabbath” means *sefirotic* union or wholeness. The following passage, from the 16th Century Kabbalistic work, *Tola‘at Ya‘aqob*, is exemplary:

The entire harmonious configuration is called “Shabbat,” the mystery of coupling, for [on the Sabbath day] the lovers have returned to each other face-to-face. For the Community of Israel [*Malkhut*] was given to the Sabbath [here, *Yesod/Tiferet*] as a partner.⁹

II. *The Mythic Structure of the Kabbalistic Sabbath*

For the Kabbalist, the Sabbath is a day of deep transformation that pervades the Cosmos and brings with it renewal and healing that occur simultaneously on three planes: 1) within the dimension of Time, 2) within the world of divinity and the upper spheres, and 3) within the Person (or believer). These transformations are related in a series of myths that we shall first consider on their own and, thereafter, within the context of Sabbath-ritual.

1. *Sabbath represents a weekly instantiation of Sacred Time, a day when mythic moments are said to erupt into the present, when past, present and future conflate*. “Sabbath” is said to be a reflection of the Primordial Seventh day of Creation and an adumbration of the World-to-Come; it signifies both Edenic and Messianic time.

Further, “Sabbath” is said to be the well-spring sustaining weekly time, “the fount of blessings” for the rest of the days.¹⁰ In short, we may term the Sabbath “fulfilled time.”

7. See Nahmanides on Deut. 5:15

8. Zohar 2:92a; for further discussion see MZ 2:490-4 and M. Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, Gate 23, “*Shabbat*.”

9. Meir ibn Gabbai, *Tola‘at Ya‘aqob* (TY), p. 45a

10. See e.g. Zohar 2:63b and 3:144b. Also cf. I. Horowitz, *Sheney Luhot HaBrit* on “*Shabbat*.”

2. *The transformation of the divine world is conveyed in three major motifs which merit elaboration:*

- a) the liberation of the *Shekhinah*/Sabbath from her entanglement in the demonic forces of the Other Side (*Sitra' Ahra'*), suggestively symbolized as the "six profane days,"
- b) the coronation of the Holy One (i.e. *Tiferet*) and of *Shekhinah*/*Malkhut*, and
- c) perhaps most prominently, the mystical marriage of the masculine and feminine potencies within God.

A fourth motif, featured in the *Tiqqunei HaZohar* may be considered an elaboration of motifs a) and b): the divestment of *Shekhinah* from her defiling, constraining garb of *Sitra' Ahra'* and her re-garbing in garments of majesty and holiness.

In many ways the protagonist of these myths is the *Sefirah Malkhut*, or *Shekhinah*. Her status serves as an index for the state of the Cosmos. As the final *sefirah*, she occupies a liminal position, poised between worlds. She mediates between the *sefirot* and the lower worlds, on the one hand, and between the world of divinity and the demonic world, on the other. For the time being we shall consider only the second case.

Since the resolution of *Malkhut's* status depends on the identity of her contiguous "partner," the state of the Cosmos may be formulated in binary fashion: *Shekhinah*/Other Side vs. *Shekhinah*/*Sefirot*. Her exile and entrapment among the demonic forces represents the broken state of the Cosmos (and, by implication, the unredeemed status of the Jew); her re-union with her lover, *Tiferet*, is an index of cosmic harmony (and spiritual renewal for the Jew who participates in this drama through the *mizvot*). These examples imply a Kabbalistic model for holiness: Holiness means proper Order. This entails, first, the *separation* of holy and demonic potencies and the setting of clear boundaries between them, and second, the re-aggregation and *fusion* of all holy aspects.

The notion of proper ordering, of what Mircea Eliade has called "Cosmos," is also rendered in more pictorial language throughout the Zohar. To cite one example: During the week, when she is among demonic forces, *Shekhinah* is like a closed rose, but, on Sabbath, she "opens to receive spices and fragrances"¹¹ and to give souls and joy to her children.¹²

3. *The person is transformed on Sabbath eve.* The most graphic, and certainly the best known, marker of this ontological transformation is the assimilation of the *Neshamah Yeterah*, the Sabbath soul. The elaboration of this essentially Kabbalistic motif¹³ has had profound effect on the popular understanding of the Sabbath. For the Kabbalists, the Sabbath-soul is a metaphysical entity deriving from the *sefirotic* world. It is both emblem and cause of an inner change; it represents the internalization of the

11. Referring to her union with *Tiferet*.

12. *Tiqqunei HaZohar* #6, 22a.

13. *Neshamah Yeterah* is mentioned but once in the Rabbinic literature: TB *Bezah* 16a. The Medieval philosophers tended either to ignore or to rationalize this motif. Cf. MZ 2:488ff.

Sabbath-cosmos and indicates that the human microcosm now fully mirrors the divine archetype.¹⁴ Further, the *Neshamah Yeterah* affords the devotee access to the pneumatic world, as it transforms his spiritual and psychological being: "Throughout the sojourn of the Sabbath-soul man's soul is elevated and enlarged."¹⁵

The Sabbath-soul is said to form a "crown of kingship" for each Jew¹⁶; through it, he comes to reflect the divine coronation above. In another striking image, the *Neshamah Yeterah* is called a "garment of light," that restores to the devotee the sublime radiance that Adam had before the Fall.¹⁷ In another account, it is called a "symbol [*dugmeta*'] of the World-to-Come," an instantiation of the soul that humankind will have at the end of days. In a more daring metaphor, it is said to be a symbol of the Holy One Himself, who will be the crown for each Jew at the end of days.¹⁸

The Kabbalah also speaks of the emotional (and moralistic) ramifications of the Sabbath-soul's presence. This spirit uproots sorrow and pain, as it brings joy, and endows husbands and wives with harmonious relations.¹⁹ Thus, Sabbath is said to be the ideal time for marital intercourse.

The multiple changes of which we have been speaking point to a transformation of the entire Cosmos. Not only are Time, Divinity, and Person renewed, but the angelic worlds and even Gehinnom. "Indeed, the upper and lower worlds are in union"²⁰ and a rule of complete Compassion [*rahamim gemurim*] pervades the universe. This Sabbath-order is dramatized in the famous Zohar passage, *Raza deShabbat*:

When the Sabbath arrives, she is placed by herself, separated from the wrong unholy side. All manner of strife is kept from her; she remains in communion with the Holy Light [*Tiferet*]. She is crowned with several crowns in the presence of the Holy King. All wanton tyrannies and lords of affliction [the Other Side] flee from her and vanish. There is no other supernal realm in the entire cosmos. On earth she is crowned by holy people who are crowned with new souls.²¹

III. *The Kabbalistic Sabbath in Ritual*

As anthropologist Clifford Geertz has noted, "men attain their faith as they portray it." It is through the performance of Sabbath ritual: the preparatory acts, the Sabbath-*mizvot* and sacralized *minhagim*, that the meaning of Sabbath is activated in the life of the mystic. In this final section, I shall focus on the ritual of Sabbath eve, providing notes toward a phenomenology of the day. The composite portrait presented here is

14. See TY, 46

15. Ibid., 59a

16. See Zohar 3:242b (*Ra'aya Mehemna*) and 2:136a.

17. See *Tiqunei HaZohar*, introduction, 11a and MZ 2:499, n162.

18. TY, 59a. Cf. Zohar *Hadash*, 26a, on TB *Megillah* 15a.

19. See MZ 2:500-1

20. Zohar 2:205a

21. Zohar 2:135a-b.

fashioned from four main sources: two classical works — the Zohar (and its ancillary texts) and the *Tola 'at Ya'aqob* of Meir ibn Gabbai; and two works reflecting the influence of Safed Kabbalah — *Sefer Seder Ha Yom* of Moshe ibn Makhir, and the *Shulḥan Arukh of the 'Ari*, codified by Jacob Zemaḥ in the 17th century.

Phase I: Separation

The earliest preparatory rituals tend to focus on the devotee's separation from his weekday status. Several of these imply a kind of "symbolic death" of one's ordinary being. Two prime examples of such "separation" are fasting and the seemingly mundane act of nailparing.

1. Moshe ibn Makhir reports that the Safed Kabbalists would fast on Friday so as to leave room for the incoming Sabbath and to "eat on Sabbath with a ravenous soul," thereby increasing the *mizvah* of *'Oneg Shabbat*.

2. The Kabbalistic custom of nail-paring before the Sabbath articulates this separation more clearly and merits elaboration. According to the Kabbalists, the nails are a vestige of man's Edenic garb:

The garment that Adam wore . . . [was made of] nail.²² When Adam was in the Garden . . . [this garment] surrounded him and no evil could draw near him. When he sinned . . . he was divested of his garment. Nothing remains except for [the nails] at the tips of the fingers and toes, and they are surrounded by filth.²³

This primordial garment symbolizes the aspect of *Din* in the cosmos. *Din* was originally created both to protect man from outside pollution and to arouse in him the fear of God. It thus had an essential role in the primal order of things. The garment, in its unbroken state, served as a womb-like *qelippah* (or shell) protecting Adam from defiling forces, while itself deriving from that realm. But, in its broken state, the sense of balance between *Din* and divinity was upset and the more demonic aspects of the nail predominated: no longer protective, its vestige attracted filth and symbolized man's diminution.

However, on Sabbath, the human being is once again enlarged as he approaches his earlier Edenic state. The act of nail-paring is a symbolic means of purging oneself of the demonic forces that infiltrate the week²⁴ and an act of preparation for receiving the Sabbath-soul. Through this rite the Kabbalist also correlates himself with the divine drama that is unfolding: the separation of *Shekhinah* from her entrapment in *Sitra*² *Ahṛa*².

22. This idea is first found in *Pirquei de Rabbi Eliezer*, Chapter 14, and *Targum Jonathan* on Genesis 3:7, 21. Also cf Zohar 2:208b.

23. TY, 46a.

24. In the Zohar 3:248b (*Ra'aya Mehemna*²) and 3:79, nail paring is mentioned as a ritual of purging for women about to leave *Niddah*. It seems possible that in forming the new pre-Sabbath rituals of ablution and nail-paring the later Kabbalists drew on extant rituals of purification available to women. This needs further investigation.

Phase II: Liminality and Confirmation: Entering the Sabbath

Shabbat, the Kabbalists seem to imply, begins in increments. To return to our opening simile, it is like a light that begins to grow in anticipation of the day and reaches its climax only during Saturday afternoon. It then begins to fade, a residue lasting beyond the conventional marker of *Havdalah*. While the ritual of candle-lighting unequivocally marks the beginning of Shabbat from a halakhic standpoint, the *existential* beginning of Sabbath, which may be correlated with receiving the Sabbath-soul, does not always concur with the halakhic marker. Various traditions may be found.²⁵ For example, Isaac Luria is said to have beheld the descent of the souls during *Kabbalat Shabbat*. Another tradition links their descent to the lighting of candles:

When Israel below is sanctifying the day . . . the Tree of Life [*Tiferet*] is aroused and a wind blows in from the World-to-Come [*Binah*]. Its branches rustle and sway, bearing aloft the scent of the World-to-Come. The Tree of Life stirs and brings forth holy souls, dispersing them throughout the world.²⁶

Another tradition correlates the descent to the recitation of the *Hashkiveynu*: "As Israel utters the blessing 'Blessed are You . . . who spreads the shelter of peace over us . . . ' the Supernal Shelter of Peace [*Malkhut*] descends and spreads her wings over Israel like a mother protecting her children. . . . She [then] bestows new souls upon each and every one."²⁷

But the tradition that concerns us most here is one that locates the existential beginning of Sabbath at an earlier stage: during *tevilah* or ritual immersion. For those observing this tradition, this act forms the *liminal* phase of Sabbath ritual.

The devotee, stark naked in the dying light of the day, immerses himself in the river and is symbolically purified of the stain of the week. The *Tola'at Ya'aqob* states:

During the week Another Spirit holds sway over the world and on Sabbath eve the holy people must cleanse themselves of this [impurity] to enter into the mystery of the Holy Faith [Sabbath/*Malkhut*] . . . [they do so] by immersing themselves in the river.

As the devotee emerges, he feels the numinous presence of the Supernal Mother, *Shekhinah*, the Shelter of Peace. She spreads her wings and "crowns him with an extra soul."²⁸ The devotee is thus "reborn" into the Sabbath-cosmos.

The Safed Kabbalists added to the act of ablution still another layer of

25. It seems fitting that the kabbalistic tradition refrained from rigidly fixing this moment of reception. For the moment when the Sabbath fully enters the life of the devotee shifts from week to week, from person to person.

26. Zohar 3:173a. Also cf. TY, 47a.

27. Zohar 1:48a.

28. TY, 46b.

meaning which is worthy of mention. Moshe ibn Makhir writes: "They used to go down to the river to immerse themselves. Afterwards they went out to greet the Bride and received their Sabbath-soul with purity and holiness." This seems straightforward enough, but then he adds a surprising and somewhat cryptic remark: "They used to immerse themselves with their wives in order to direct their hearts to one Place."²⁹ This passage portrays ablution as a mystery rite, apparently symbolizing the union of the Supernal Bride and Groom.

If ritual immersion is a rite of transformation, the contiguous act of dressing is one of confirmation: visibly affirming the devotee's new ontological status. He is bidden to don fresh clothes "so as to emulate the Creator" who is newly coronated and dressed in royal vestment.

According to one tradition, divinity is garbed in "ten lower crowns" during the week. These "crowns" dim the divine light and serve as a barrier between God and Humankind: "But on Sabbath, He is divested of them and dressed in several garments of light."³⁰

Through dressing "as befits one's means," the devotee is afforded access to the divine realm: Now "he may be seen before the King dressed in accord with the celestial paradigm."³¹

We may view the two phases of Sabbath-preparation, which we have just examined, in a slightly different light. In a sense, these rituals detail the progressive rapprochement of the Sabbath and the Jew, their meeting and interpenetration. As the Jew enters into the Sabbath, the Sabbath enters into the Jew. This process is often depicted through images of Sacred Space. The Jew is said to dwell within the Sabbath: "under the Shelter of Peace," "within the *miqdash*," while the Sabbath is said to dwell within the devotee's abode and within the chambers of his soul. To cite one example from the Zohar, one's home, when properly prepared, becomes a nuptial chamber for the Bride:

"Observe the Sabbath throughout the generations [DoRoTaM]" [Ex. 31:16] . . . The word DoRoTaM hints at the notion of dwelling [DiRoTaM]: When the Sabbath enters, the dwelling place must be prepared like the chamber of the bridegroom set to receive his bride . . . The Holy Bride is ushered into Israel's abode, to be in their midst, as the Sabbath begins.³²

Similarly, the Jew prepares within himself a chamber or *dirah* where the Sabbath-soul may reside. Having divested himself of the profane through fasting, nail-paring and ablution, the devotee has become temporarily "empty," that is, spiritually ready to receive and be filled with the Sabbath.

Phase III: A World That is Wholly Shabbat: Notes On Shekhinah as Symbol and on the Friday Night Meal

29. *Sefer Seder HaYom*, 41a.

30. TY 46b. Also cf. TY 59b and *Tiqunei HaZohar* # 69, pp. 108b-109a.

31. TY, 46b; also see MZ 2:495.

32. Zohar 3:300b-301a Tos.

The leitmotif of Friday night in Jewish mysticism is Sacred Marriage. This mythos is repeatedly symbolized through the evening prayers, the festive meal and the sacred act of marital intercourse. The metaphysical focus is on Shekhinah, the Bride, the divine "Sabbath" most closely associated with Friday night. As the *sefirah* connecting the upper and lower worlds, *Shekhinah* symbolizes God's immanence. This numinous Presence is profoundly experienced by the Kabbalist on Friday night.

"A strange twilight atmosphere made possible an almost complete identification of the *Shekhinah* not only with the Queen of the Sabbath," but also with the Jew.³³ On Sabbath eve, *Shekhinah* is variously symbolized by (and so, identified with) the People of Israel, the devotee, his wife and mother. This identification may be illustrated through several examples:

1) *The devotee as symbol of Shekhinah*. The Safed Kabbalists would recite the Sabbath Psalms with closed eyes, thereby symbolizing the *Shekhinah* who is called "the beautiful virgin who has no eyes," having lost her eyes from weeping in exile.³⁴

2) *Wife as symbol of Shekhinah*. The woman's obligation to light candles is explained on *Sefirotic* grounds. Likening the soul to a flickering flame,³⁵ the Kabbalists homologize the kindling of lights to the bringing forth of souls by *Shekhinah*. The woman lighting candles is said to be the most fitting symbol of the *Shekhinah*. The Zohar states:

Shekhinah is the Lady of the Cosmos, and the souls which are called the Supernal Candles rest in her. Thus, the woman must light the candles, for *Shekhinah* adheres to her and acts [through her].³⁶

A second point of identification occurs during the chanting of a "Woman of Valor" at the dinner table. Although this was first instituted by the Kabbalists as a hymn to the *Shekhinah*, the custom attained much of its original popularity due to the ambiguity of reference: simultaneously evoking the devotee's wife and the Bride.

3) *The devotee's mother as symbol of Shekhinah*. The Lurianic custom of first kissing one's mother upon entering the house on Friday night is simultaneously an act of welcome to one's mother, and one's Mother, the *Matronita*², who is said to be the "honored guest" at the festive meal.

4) *The Community of Israel as symbol for Shekhinah*. As we have seen in the Aggadah where the Community of Israel is wed to the Sabbath, the former refers to supernal Israel in its primary meaning and to earthly Israel on a secondary level. Through this symbolic connection, the two meanings are brought together: the boundaries blur between Israel and *Shekhinah*.

An even more striking example may be found in what is undoubtedly

33. Cf. OKS, pp. 140-1. Here my claim extends beyond that of Scholem.

34. Ibid.

35. Cf. *Proverbs* 20:27

36. Zohar 1:48b. Also cf. TY, 47a.

the most famous Kabbalistic hymn, *Lekhhah Dodi*. This prayer attains a complex richness of meaning through its ambiguity of reference. For example, the "Sabbath Bride" refers at once to a personification of the day and to *Shekhinah*, while Zion, in its soon-to-be-redeemed state, implies both the restoration of the Jewish People and that of *Shekhinah*, the supernal Zion.

We have, in this section, touched upon only several meanings of *Shekhinah*. Throughout the Kabbalistic literature, it includes such a wide variety of significations, summoning images of such emotionally charged richness and ambiguity, that it comes to represent the Whole. Indeed, "*Shekhinah*" simultaneously evokes the world of Jewish society and the world of divinity. Of such complex symbols the anthropologist James Fernandez has written:

They tend to shift one's attention away from the current metaphysical focus . . . to the whole . . . [Such] symbols thus add the possibility of the experience of [multiple] levels of meaning . . . They fill out the universe of religious experience, giving it resonance, a thick complexity and potency.³⁷

By their mere presence such symbols as "*Shekhinah*" can evoke a feeling of awe "that can only be inspired by the human total."³⁸

We shall now turn to the last ritual under study: the festive meal on Friday night. In the Kabbalah, the three prescribed Sabbath meals become joyous mystery rites, reflecting the inner workings of the divine realm and providing living contact with it. The first meal is said to correspond to *Shekhinah*. Thus, the Kabbalists of Safed would proclaim:

Prepare the meal of perfect Faith, the meal of Kingship. This is the meal of the Holy Apple Orchard, [the meal of *Shekhinah*].³⁹

These mystics would begin the meal with a silent procession around the table; the participants would take two bundles of myrtle, representing the Bride and Groom, and unite them in blessing. The immediate physical environment was lent symbolic significance. Following the Zohar, the parts of the table, the menorah and the couch were correlated with various *sefirot*. As a whole, the festive table was said to mirror the tables in the supernal Palaces of Light where the righteous rejoice on the Sabbath.

After the preliminary hymns, the Kiddush would be chanted. The symbolic significance of this ceremony was three-fold: an attestation to the Work of Creation, an evocation of the divine coronation, and an evocation of sacred marriage. Each of the seventy words of the Kiddush was seen as a symbol, representing and helping effect the cloaking of *Malkhut* in seventy crowns of light. Drawing on the dual meaning of the root *KaDeSH*,⁴⁰ the Kiddush was likened to a wedding ceremony. The drink-

37. James Fernandez, "The Performance of Ritual Metaphors," in J. David Sapir, ed., *The Social Uses of Metaphor*, p. 126.

38. Victor Turner in *Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, 1967), p. 44.

39. Zohar I:48b

40. Meaning both to "sanctify" and to "betroth."

ing of the wine symbolized its consummation: the joyous union of Bride and Groom.

Through rejoicing at the Sabbath meal, one regaled one's Sabbath soul and so entered the pneumatic world. According to a teaching in the Zohar, the *Neshamah Yeterah* divided into two as the Sabbath arrived, with one part remaining in the celestial world, while the other descended to crown Israel below.

The supernal portion is crowned on this day through the rejoicing on high . . . the lower portion is crowned through the rejoicing below, through these feasts. So one must regale her with food and drink, nice clothing and rejoicing. When this portion is crowned below . . . she ascends and joins with the other portion. . . . She receives the [divine influx] from above and below and is encompassed on all sides.⁴¹

Thus, to enter the Kabbalistic Sabbath is to enter a world full of transcendence and multiple meaning. The complex significations of the day and the rapture with which it was experienced by the Kabbalists is evoked in marvelous fashion by Isaac Luria in his table hymn, '*Azamer BiShevahin*':⁴²

I sing in hymns
to enter the gates,
of the field of apples
of holy ones.

Torment and cries
are past.
Now there are new faces
and souls and spirits.

A new table
we lay for her,
a beautiful candlebrum
sheds its light upon us.

Her husband gives her joy
in twofold measure.
Lights shine
and streams of blessing.

Between right and left
the Bride approaches
in holy jewels
and festive garments . . .

Bridesmen, go forth
and prepare the Bride . . .

41. Zohar 2:204b. Also cf. TY 55a.

42. A complete version of this hymn in translation may be found in OKS, pp. 143-4.

The Sabbath as Dialectic: The Meaning and Role

CHAIM I. WAXMAN

"More than the Jews kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept them."¹

WHILE RECENT SOCIOLOGICAL LITERATURE on American Orthodox Jewry highlights important distinctions among different types and categories of those who are labelled Orthodox, like observant and non-observant, right wing and left wing, church and sect, Hasidic and non-Hasidic, etc.,² I will not dwell upon those distinctions in this article. The only group whom I specifically exclude from this analysis are the non-observant Orthodox, those who identify themselves as Orthodox by virtue of their membership in an Orthodox synagogue but who do not observe even the most elementary religious laws, such as dietary laws and the Sabbath, in accordance with Orthodox tradition. Their non-observance sets them apart from the Orthodox community or communities in fundamental ways, despite their synagogue affiliation, and they are, therefore, beyond the scope of this analysis. All other distinctions among the various subgroups of observant Orthodox, however, are not of any great significance in terms of the functions of the Sabbath, and they will be treated, therefore, as parts of one unit.

On one level, the Sabbath, as part of religion and religious behavior, provides location and meaning for those who adhere to it. As the sociologist, Peter L. Berger, suggests, two of the major functions of religion are to provide order and meaning for both the structures of society and the subjective consciousness of the individual. Human beings have an innate need for order and meaning, he argues. Chaos and meaninglessness are intolerable. Religion provides order by linking *nomos* with *cosmos*, by linking human society and its structures with a

1. Aḥad Ha-am, *Al Parashat Derakhim* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Dvir and Hozaah Ivrit, 1964), Vol. II, p. 139.

2. See, among others, Charles S. Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life," *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 66, 1965, pp. 21-97; Egon Mayer and Chaim I. Waxman, "Modern Jewish Orthodoxy in America: Toward the Year 2000," *Tradition*, Vol. 16, No. 3, (Spring 1977): 98-112; Lawrence Kaplan, "The Ambiguous Modern Orthodox Jew," *JUDAISM* Vol. 28, No. 4 (Fall 1979): 439-448; Reuven P. Bulka, ed., *Dimensions of American Orthodox Judaism* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1981); David J. Schnall, "Orthodoxy Resurgent," *JUDAISM*, XXX, 4 (1981); William B. Helmreich and Laurence Kaplan, "Trends Within Contemporary Orthodoxy," and Robert Gordis, "'Unobservant,' 'Modern' and Other Orthodox Jews," *JUDAISM*, XXX, 3 (1981).

universal sacred order, and it provides meaning by positing a sacred cosmos and locating man and society within it. While some individuals may require more elaborate cognitive meaning and understanding, for most people the assurance that there is meaning to the world and their lives is sufficient, even if they do not cognitively understand it. At its most basic level, religion provides its adherents with the assurance of such meaning and order, and it provides each of them with an identity within that order. By internalizing the religious norms, the individual has a much firmer grasp on his or herself and his/her world.³

The same notion was expressed, in a somewhat different manner, by Tevye, in the opening lines of *Fiddler on the Roof*, when he said, "Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years . . . Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do."⁴

This combination of order, meaning and identity is explicitly articulated by the nineteenth century leader of German-Jewish Orthodoxy, Samson Raphael Hirsch, in his discussion of the meaning of the Sabbath, in his major work, *Horeb*:

Thus, doing no work on the Sabbath is an *ot*, an expressive symbol for all time. The Sabbath expresses the truth that the Only God is the Creator and Master of all and that man, together with all else, has been called to the service of the Only God. It is *moed*, a time-institution, a day singled out from other days, a summons to the ennoblement of life. It is *kodesh*, a holy time: if, during the six working days, man forgets that Almighty God is the Source of all power and his Lawgiver, then the Sabbath comes to elevate him by directing him once again towards his Creator. It is *brit*, a covenant, the only contract and basis of every relationship between God and the Jew, both as man and as Israelite. For if you consider the world and yourself as God's property, and regard your power over the earth as lent to you by God for the fulfillment of your task in life, then will your life be lived in accordance with the Torah . . . Finally, it is *brakha*, a blessing; if you thus renew your covenant with God every Sabbath, and dedicate yourself as God's servant, then on every Sabbath God will give you renewed enlightenment of the spirit, enthusiasm and strength for the fulfillment of this great task. In this way you will realize how God really calls you to an elevated state of life which is especially experienced on Sabbath.⁵

Abraham J. Heschel has elaborated on two of the components enumerated by Hirsch, *moed* and *kodesh*, in his explanation of the meaning of the Sabbath, especially for modern man, as the celebration of time:

The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to *holiness in time*. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation

3. Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), esp. chs. 1-3.

4. Joseph Stein, *Fiddler on the Roof*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1964), p. 1.

5. Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb: A Philosophy of Jewish Laws and Observances* (London: Soncino Press, 1962), pp. 63-64.

to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.⁶

It is somewhat ironic that the contemporary Christian theologian, Harvey Cox, through his studies of — and experiences in — Eastern religions, has grasped the meaning of this aspect of the Sabbath to a degree which is unattained by many modern Jewish religious thinkers. “Can we ever regain the glorious vision of Sabbath as a radiant queen, a jeweled sovereign who comes to visit bringing warmth and joy in her train?” he asks.

The poor and often inept Hasidic Jews in the stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer may bicker and complain, and they suffer, but when the sun goes down and the lamps begin to flicker on Friday evening, a kind of magic touches their world. Special cakes have been baked, and now the sacred candles are lighted. Sabbath is eternity in time, as Abraham Heschel says; it is a cathedral made not with stones and glass but with hours and minutes. It is a sacred symbol that no one can tear down or destroy. It comes every week, inviting human beings not to strive and succeed, not even to pray very much, but to taste and know that God is good, that the earth and the flesh are there to be shared and enjoyed.⁷

Having discovered this meaning of the Sabbath, Cox then provides some food for thought to contemporary Jewish youth: “To rediscover in our time this underlying human meaning of the Sabbath should make Jewish young people think twice about whether they want to follow in the footsteps of ‘enlightened’ parents who have shied away from Sabbath observance as an embarrassment.”⁸

In a rather different vein than that of Heschel, and consistent with the Hirschian tradition, Emanuel Rackman suggests that the Sabbath enables the individual to recognize his freedom from greed and envy: “When, by self-discipline, man shows that it is in his power to call a halt to the acquisition of things and the exploitation of natural resources, it can be said that his craving for economic power is not altogether his master.”⁹ By abstaining from the exploitation or manipulation, though not consumption, of nature and its resources, human beings cultivate both mastery over greed and envy, and a return to nature.¹⁰

With a somewhat similar emphasis on freedom and unity between man and nature, Erich Fromm interprets the Sabbath, “perhaps the central institution of biblical and rabbinic religion”,¹¹ as symbolizing “a state of union between man and nature and between man and man. By not

6. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, expanded edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Co., 1952), p. 10.

7. Harvey Cox, *Turning East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), pp. 70–71.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

9. Emanuel Rackman: *Sabbath and Festivals in the Modern Age. Studies in Torah Judaism, No. 2.* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1961), p. 16.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–19.

11. Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be As Gods* (New York: Fawcett, 1966), p. 152.

working — that is to say, by not participating in the process of natural and social change — man is free from the chains of time, although only for one day a week.”¹² This follows from Fromm’s interpretation of the concept of “work” (*melakhah*) which is prohibited on the Sabbath:

“Work” is any interference by man, be it constructive or destructive, with the physical world. “Rest” is a state of peace between man and nature. Man must leave nature untouched, not change it in any way, either by building or by destroying anything. Even the smallest change made by man in the natural process is a violation of rest. The Sabbath is the day of complete harmony between man and nature. “Work” is any kind of disturbance of the man-nature equilibrium.¹³

The similarities between this conception and that of Rackman are clear. They both stress the man-nature relationship. Fromm’s definition of *melakhah* is also strikingly similar to that of Dayan Grunfeld who, following Hirsch, states that *melakhah* “includes within its scope any activity of a constructive nature which makes some significant change in our material environment — significant, that is, in relation to its usefulness for human purposes.”¹⁴ However, Grunfeld adds an important element which Fromm does not, namely, that according to Hirsch, the basic idea behind the Sabbath is to give witness to God’s mastery over the universe. *Melakhah*, therefore, is “an act that shows man’s mastery over the world by the constructive exercise of his intelligence and skill.”¹⁵

It goes without saying that while these are the ultimate meanings of the traditional Jewish Sabbath, according to a variety of contemporary thinkers, not everyone in the traditional community internalizes and comprehends them. There are, of course, many for whom the Sabbath is a burden rather than a pleasure. For them, the Sabbath is a host of prohibitions which prevent them from doing what they might otherwise want to do, and they count the hours and minutes until its conclusion. Be that as it may, the Sabbath is not rendered any less significant, according to traditional religious leaders. Changing any of the essential characteristics of the Sabbath, they argue, would destroy its ultimate meaning without, in all probability, making it any more significant for those who have not grasped its significance in the first place.

If we approach the subject more empirically than philosophically, we see the Sabbath emerging as pivotal in the development of the communal life of the Orthodox community. Following the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), who defined religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral

12. Ibid., p. 155.

13. Ibid., p. 154. It is, perhaps, somewhat ironic that one with such a deep understanding of the significance of the Sabbath could have so alienated himself from Zionism, Israel and the Jewish community as Fromm did toward the end of his life.

14. Dayan Dr. I Grunfeld, *The Sabbath* (New York: Feldheim, 1956), p. 19.

15. Ibid.

community . . . , all those who adhere to them,"¹⁶ the Sabbath stands out as most functional for the Orthodox community because of its role in promoting community development.

The Sabbath and its requirements, as defined in Orthodoxy, virtually predefine where one may live: One must live within walking distance of a synagogue.¹⁷ While this prescription strongly limits the opportunities available, in terms of geographic mobility, it also prevents many of the problems which mobility frequently entails for the rest of the society. Orthodox Jews do not experience the same kinds of struggles to develop roots in communities to which they have recently moved, as do many others in the larger society, because the Sabbath assures that they will have a community. By virtue of the Sabbath, it is given that one will live within walking distance of the synagogue and, invariably, within walking distance of at least some, if not most or all, of the other members of the synagogue-community. Orthodox Jews do not have to worry about where they will meet people in their new neighborhood; they know that they will meet them in the synagogue on the very first Sabbath there. They also know that there they will probably meet children with whom their own children will socialize and, in many cases, with whom they will also go to school.

While many in modern society are engaged in what Robert Nisbet has termed, "the quest for community",¹⁸ Orthodox Jews, even though they are a highly urban group, do not experience the same sense of loss of community because the Sabbath provides them with a very concrete, primary community. For at least one day a week, they are engaged in a more intensive "*Gemeinschaft*-like"¹⁹ existence than is much of the rest of modern society. The members of each of the primary communities of Orthodox Jews reinforce the sense of community through a whole range of rituals which they observe, and they are thus linked to more distant Jewish communities, present and past, and to the more abstract community of world Jewry. As Charles Liebman has perceptively observed:

The Orthodox Jew lives with a sense of omnipresent community which mediates relationships to other Jews, to Jewish history, and to major Jewish symbols. At the simplest level this means that relationships to the local

16. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, tr. by Joseph Ward Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 62.

17. While one can observe much of the Sabbath without going to synagogue, traditional Jewish custom and law attribute special significance to communal prayer, or synagogue attendance, on the Sabbath and holidays. According to Nahmanides, this is implicit in the term, "holy convocations" (Leviticus 23:2): "The meaning of *mikra'ei kodesh* (holy convocations), is that all people should come together on that day and be assembled to sanctify it, for it is a commandment upon Israel to be gathered together in God's House on the (Sabbath and) festival day to hallow it publicly with prayer and praise to God . . ." (Ramban [Nahmanides], *Commentary on the Torah*, Vol. 3, translated by Rabbi Charles B. Chavel [New York: Shilo Publishing Co., 1974], p. 35).

18. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

19. Werner J. Cahnman and Rudolph Heberle, eds. *Ferdinand Toennies on Sociology: Pure, Applied, and Empirical* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

Jewish community, the national Jewish community and even to Israel take place through a network of institutions (the synagogue, the day school, American counterparts of political parties, hospitals and other philanthropic societies, etc.) which share an Orthodox orientation. On the other hand, relationships at the most intimate level, family and peers, are, at least to some extent, governed by a sense of obligation toward the rules and customs of that community. The same sense of community governs relationships to the Jewish past. Now this has a double reinforcing effect. Precisely because of the omnipresent sense of community, the notion of ritual and the efficacy of ritual . . . is natural rather than artificial. Gripped in the web of community bonds, both in the metaphysical as well as a material sense, the Orthodox Jew believes because he experiences.²⁰

The base upon which this "web of community bonds" rests is the closeness of physical proximity among the members of each synagogue-community, which derives from the Sabbath and its observance according to Orthodox standards. The *halakhah* aside, the fact that Orthodoxy proscribes driving a car on the Sabbath even for the purpose of attending services at the synagogue, thus, has very deep sociological significance. It lays the foundation for "the omnipresent sense of community" which is unequalled in other branches of Jewry.

Moreover, it seems reasonable to suggest that one of the reasons for the very sparse involvement of Orthodox Jews in the *Chavurah* movement²¹ is related to this connection between the Sabbath and community. As Bernard Reisman points out, many of those involved in *chavurot* are there because of their desire for a sense of community.²² Since the Sabbath itself creates community among Orthodox Jews, they have no need to create something new nor to recreate something which has been absent for more than 1500 years. They have maintained *Gemeinschaft* within *Gesellschaft*, community within society, throughout the years through their observance of the Sabbath and, as Aḥad Ha-am keenly indicated, the Sabbath maintained them.

Finally, given the concern in the general American society and in the American Jewish community over the state of the institution of the family, it would be unconscionable to omit reference to the relationship between the Sabbath and the family. Tempting as it is to poke fun at the somewhat trite adage that, "The family that prays together stays together," since the family that does many other things together may equally stay together, it is, nevertheless, the case that the Sabbath, as observed in Orthodox homes, does often facilitate the development of intrafamily bonds which might otherwise be considerably weaker. Parents walking to the synagogue with their children whom they may have hardly seen or had

20. Charles S. Liebman, "The Sociology of Religion and the Study of American Jews," *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 34, No. 5 (May/June 1981): 27-28.

21. Bernard Reisman, *The Chavurah* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1977), pp. 70-71.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-35.

any significant interpersonal contact with all during the week, often expressing "Thank God for Shabbos" (or "Shabbat"), and families sitting down together for the Sabbath evening and day meals, eating and singing together uninterrupted by weekday business, telephone calls, etc., are typical phenomena within Orthodox families. The Sabbath, thus, provides a setting which facilitates and promotes a degree of intense family life which might otherwise be difficult to achieve in modern society.²³

Along these lines, it is interesting to observe that the National Jewish Family Center of the American Jewish Committee's Jewish Communal Affairs Department has recently published *A Shabbat Haggadah*,²⁴ compiled by Michael Strassfeld who, not coincidentally, was co-editor of *The Jewish Catalog*.²⁵ Many of the standard traditional Sabbath rituals appear in a format reminiscent of the Passover *Haggadah*, says Yehudah Rosenman, Coordinator of the NJFC, because of the exceptional popularity of Passover among all of the holidays in the Jewish calendar.²⁶ The *Seder* is a family celebration and the *Shabbat Haggadah* was produced to serve "as an introduction and guide to (another) joyous Jewish living experience",²⁷ by transforming the Sabbath "meal into a ritual."²⁸ The success of this commendable effort remains to be seen. In any event, there is nothing new in it for Orthodox Jewry. For them, it is no more than old wine in new bottles.

At the beginning of this article I indicated that I was excluding the so-called "non-observant" Orthodox from this analysis because their non-observance removes them in fundamental ways from the Orthodox community. From a sociological and communal perspective, Herman Wouk is even more correct today than he was in 1959, when he asserted that, as the result of several significant factors "the Sabbath is the usual breaking off point from tradition. . . ."²⁹ The Orthodox community regards Sabbath observance as a much more significant criterion for membership today than it did a generation or two ago because of both internal and external developments. Internally, Orthodox Jewry in this country has matured and been able to produce a generation which has achieved a level of Jewish education that would have been inconceivable as recently as fifty years ago. The quantitative and qualitative growth of Orthodox

23. It should be noted that because the Sabbath is the day when one is free from the turmoil of the work-week, Jewish tradition recommends the eve of the Sabbath as the most appropriate time for a husband and his wife to engage in loving sexual intercourse, thus adding to, and partaking of, the sanctity and pleasure of the Sabbath.

24. Michael Strassfeld, comp., *A Shabbat Haggadah* (New York: Institute of Human Relations Press of the American Jewish Committee, 1981).

25. Richard Siegal, Michael Strassfeld, Sharon Strassfeld, eds., *The Jewish Catalog: A Do-It-Yourself Kit* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973). Also see vols. 2 and 3.

26. Yehuda Rosenman, "Foreword," *A Shabbat Haggadah*, pp. 1-2.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

28. Michael Strassfeld: "Introduction," *A Shabbat Haggadah*, p. 3.

29. Herman Wouk, *This is My God* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), p. 61.

day schools, high schools, and post-high school yeshivot, has produced a generation of Orthodox Jews who are much more positive and self-assertive about their beliefs and practices. Non-observance of the Sabbath is, therefore, much less tolerated than it was in previous generations.

Also, the fact of the matter is that socio-economic and technological developments make it much easier to be Sabbath-observant today than in the past, and the community, as a result, has higher expectations. Whereas, at the beginning of the century, many Jews were in occupations which made it extremely difficult for them, economically, to observe the Sabbath, today the five-day work week is the norm. In addition technology has made it relatively easy to set things on electric timers, so that there is a much greater convenience factor for the Sabbath observer today. In short, "You can have your cake and eat it." Or, as many traditional Jews have been singing for more than a thousand years:

Whoever duly observes the Sabbath,
Whoever keeps the Sabbath unprofaned,
Shall be greatly rewarded for his deed,
Each in his own camp, each in his own home.³⁰

30. The first stanza of a traditional Friday evening hymn, probably composed by Rabbi Moses ben Kalonymous, who lived in Mayence at the end of the tenth century. See Philip Birnbaum, *Daily Prayer Book* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1949), p. 292.

The Sabbath and Conservative Judaism

SEYMOUR SIEGEL

"We hereby establish the United Synagogue with the following ends in view:
To assert and establish loyalty to the Torah and its historical exposition
To further the observance of the Sabbath and the Dietary Laws."

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE PREAMBLE to the by-laws of the United Synagogue of America, adopted at the Founding Convention in 1913. From the very beginning of the Conservative movement, one of its central aims has been the preservation of the Sabbath, an indispensable and precious part of Judaism. In all of the institutions which make up the Conservative movement the Sabbath is observed and cherished. Within its ranks the ideas and values undergirding Sabbath observance have been developed and explicated, and laws and regulations governing Sabbath observance have been seriously considered and evaluated.

In assessing the contributions of the movement in the area of the Sabbath it is necessary to distinguish two separate aspects: the ideas and the practice.

The Ideas of the Sabbath

There is a venerable tradition within Judaism of developing *ta-amei hamizvot*, reasons for the commandments. It is not sufficient merely to command observance; it is equally necessary to explain *why* the Sabbath was instituted and *what* it is designed to accomplish. This is especially important in a non-fundamentalist version of Judaism where it is not sufficient to base observance only on the commandment that is included in authoritative sources. Therefore, Conservative Judaism developed a literature of explanation of the meaning of Shabbat.

For *ta-amei hamizvot* the original impressive source is the Bible, where three emphases are included when the Sabbath is mentioned.

First and foremost, the Sabbath is the seal of Creation, and is sanctified by God at the very beginning of cosmic history. The Sabbath and its spiritual content are an element in the understanding of the meaning and purpose of creation. This is why the final day of creative activity is stressed, and not the first day, the beginning of creation. The goal of creative activity — its end — is more important than its beginning.

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Secondly, the Sabbath is called an *ot*, an outward sign of the Covenant. Covenant is the central theme of Biblical thought; it is the hinge upon which the whole of Biblical theology turns. A covenant has been made between God and Creation, between God and Israel, and between the human race and God. The covenant establishes the relationships between God and His world. There is, however, a special Covenant with the people of Israel, who pledge to be His people, as He pledges to be their God. This relationship defines the character and destiny of Jewish history. Covenants between kings and vassals were common in the ancient Near East. When a covenant was made, it was necessary to establish an *ot*, an outward sign of the covenantal relationship. This is true in our own lives as well. For example, a marriage ring is the outward sign of the covenant of marriage; a salute is the outward sign of the covenant of military service. In a similar way, the Sabbath is the outward sign, the *ot*, of the covenant between the people of God and God. "Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep; for it is a sign (*ot*) between me and you throughout your generations, that ye may know that I am the lord that doth sanctify you" (Exodus 31:13).

Thirdly, as it emerges in the Bible, the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest includes all people, including servants. Even animals are required to rest on the Sabbath day. This makes the Sabbath one of the most revolutionary social institutions in human history, establishing the necessity and the duty of providing a period of surcease from labor for even the most humble members of the community. The Israelites, having been slaves in Egypt, are to be especially sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the oppressed.

These three Biblical ideas of the Sabbath — as the mark of creation, as a sign of the covenant and as providing rest for all — have been frequently cited in the literature of Conservative Judaism.

Among modern writers and thinkers, several have been most influential in forming the outlook of Conservative Judaism on the Sabbath. Franz Rosenzweig, though not technically part of the movement, has had an enormous influence on its ideologists. He admitted that, from an objective viewpoint, Wellhausen might be right in seeing the Sabbath as having its origins in "human folkloristic origins." However, the "divine" element in the Commandment is found in the experience of attachment to the divine which results from serious observance.

What we do know when we do is not that all of the historical and sociological explanations are false. But in the light of the doing, of the right doing in which we experience the reality of the Law, the explanations are of superficial and subsidiary importance . . .¹

Thus, the problem of "origins" is overcome in existential experience which is acquired in the "doing." The commandments, including the observance of the Sabbath, may have a "human" origin, but they are

1. In a letter, "Divine and Human," in Nahum Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig, His Life and Thought* (Schocken Books), pp. 242 ff.

"divine" in that, through observance we are brought into the Presence of God. In that sense there can be a "divine" dimension.

What is it that the Sabbath conveys to the "doer"?

Judaic faith is constructed around three "moments:" Creation, Revelation, and Redemption. Creation describes the relationship of God to the world; Revelation the relationship between God and man; and Redemption is the work of reconciling man, God, and the World. Sabbath is "the feast of Creation." By observing it, we are brought into the Presence of the Creator of the Universe

. . . and just as creation is not contained in the fact that the world was created once, but requires for its fulfillment renewal at every dawn, so the Sabbath, as the festival of creation, must not be one that is celebrated once a year, but one that is renewed throughout the year, week after week . . .²

The liturgy states the relationship between Creation and Sabbath. The Seventh Day is *zekher le-ma-asei bereshit*, a remembrance of the work of Creation.

The Sabbath, according to Rosenzweig, is also the festival of revelation. The action of reading from the Torah is testimony to the reality of our faith in Revelation. "The man called forth to the Torah from the congregation approaches the book of revelation in the knowledge of being elect . . ." of being part of the People of Revelation.

The Sabbath is also the "festival of Redemption." It is a miniature of the world to come, when all will be reconciled to God in harmony and community. Thus, through the Sabbath and its observance, the Jew affirms, in his very being, the belief in God Who created the world, Who Revealed Himself to His people, and Who will, in the end of time, bring redemption.

Very popular, in the writings of spokesmen for Conservative Judaism, are the observations on the Sabbath of the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, (who in his early years was part of the Rosenzweig-Buber circle in Frankfurt). In his collection of essays, *The Forgotten Language*,³ Fromm tries to explain the *rationale* undergirding the complicated and detailed prohibitions of the Sabbath, and points out that the halakhic structure represents an intense symbolic system. The picture projected by Jewish faith shows the world as being intended for harmonious living between man, nature, and society. Nature serves man. Man guards nature. This is the view of the Garden of Eden. It was the primal sin that brought about the primal disharmony. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" (Genesis 3:17ff). Now, nature and man are not in harmonious relationship any more. Strife, suffering, and pain are all about us. In the prophetic vision, the primal harmony will be restored at the end of time when man and nature will live peacefully

2. Glatzer, *Op. cit.*, pp. 310 ff.

3. Erich Fromm, *The Forgotten Language* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

together. The vision of the end of time is expressed in symbols, rituals and works of the imagination. The Sabbath is one of these symbols. The Seventh Day, as *me-eyn olam haba*, as a miniature of the World-to-Come, is an anticipation of what will be the norm at the Messianic time. The Sabbath prohibitions are a foretaste of the eschatological "truce" between the human world and the world of nature. That is why, Fromm explains, such "trivial" forms of "work" as carrying something from a private domain into a public domain, or striking a match, are prohibited on the Sabbath. Work is understood in the rabbinic structure "as any interference by man, be it constructive or destructive, with the physical world. Rest is a state of peace between man and nature." Therefore, Sabbath rest symbolizes the entire drama of human history: primordial harmony followed by existential disharmony with a dream and vision of restored harmony.

Most influential in the understanding of the Sabbath in Conservative Judaism have been the works of Abraham J. Heschel, especially *The Sabbath*. In that book he makes the celebrated distinction between the "problem of space" and the "problem of time." Space is the world of things, possessions; time is the spiritual, inner life of man. The perennial problem is how to relate to the world of space. It is wrong to immerse oneself fully in the world of things; this is hedonism, which leads to corruption and unhappiness. Equally wrong is the ascetic flight from the world into the realm of the "spiritual." This would deny the goodness of creation.

The solution, according to Heschel, is expressed in the Sabbath. "The faith of the Jew requires being both within and above the world (of space). It is the Sabbath, a sanctuary erected in time which supercedes the sanctuary of space." The magnificent phrase, "a sanctuary in time," points to the function of the Sabbath as providing an opportunity to consider the meaning, purpose, and value of the other six days of the week, which are devoted to the conquest of space. The Sabbath is more than "relaxation," more than "the weekend pause;" it is both resting *from* work and an *active* contemplation of the function and value of labor. The Sabbath is a safe haven from which to look upon the world with spiritual eyes, to understand both the grandeur and the transitoriness of the world of things.

Another important emphasis in Conservative Judaism in regard to the Sabbath is the recognition of *national* dimension. It is the peculiarly Jewish way of rest and is a uniquely Jewish expression of religiosity. Dr. Louis Ginzberg, in his exposition of the views of the "Positive-Historical" School founded by Zecharias Frankel (the fore-runner of Conservative Judaism), writes:

One may for instance conceive of the origin of the idea of Sabbath rest as the professor of Protestant theology at a German university would conceive it, and yet minutely observe the smallest detail of the Sabbath observance known to strict Orthodoxy. For an adherent of this school the sanctity of the

Sabbath reposes not upon the fact that it was proclaimed on Sinai, but on the fact that the Sabbath idea found for thousands of years its expression in Jewish souls.⁴

Again (as in the case of Franz Rosenzweig) we are to ignore the problem of "origins." It is not *when* or *how* the Sabbath began which is crucial, but its effect, its impact, its power to bring the Jew into the presence of the Divine which is crucial. But we are speaking not only of the *individual* Jew, but of *k'lal Yisrael* "catholic Israel." The Sabbath is *the* Jewish way of expressing religiosity and piety. For Jews, this gives it immense significance and relevance.

Sabbath Observance: The Halakhah

The Conservative movement has accepted, by and large, the traditional structure of Sabbath observance, with its thirty-nine forbidden modes of work, as well as its numerous rabbinic prohibitions and customs. In a modern, mechanized society, however, some of these prohibitions have become onerous and counterproductive.

In June, 1950, the Rabbinical Assembly, the rabbinic arm of the movement, met for its Golden Jubilee Convention. Central to the discussion at that convention was a question that had been directed to the members of the assembly by a colleague:

One cannot serve a congregation for any time without being depressed and disheartened by the widespread disintegration of Sabbath observance.

.....

Our conservative movement must marshal its forces to meet the problem. . . . I, therefore, turn to you to ask for guidance in instructing my people as to our view as a movement on the Sabbath disciplines, our best thought as to its proper observance and a practical program by which its meaning may be better understood, its spirit more widely shared, its sanctities more greatly respected by the congregation.⁵

To respond to this question, the Assembly had called upon three of its most distinguished members: Rabbis Morris Adler, Jacob Agus and Theodore Friedman.

The respondents, after outlining the significance of the Sabbath in Judaism, called upon their colleagues to undertake a campaign to revitalize Sabbath observance in the local congregations. In line with Conservative ideology they called upon the rabbis to follow a "gradual" approach, that is, an *ideal* of Sabbath rest should be presented. "However, we should urge that the maximum inclusion of the ideal should be followed, even though it falls short." The "all or nothing" approach was eschewed.

4. Louis Ginzberg, *Students, Scholars and Saints* (Jewish Publication Society, 1938), p. 201.

5. *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly, 1950*, p. 113; reprinted in Waxman, ed., *Tradition and Change*.

If a man must work on the Sabbath, he should aim at least to desist from work on Friday night. "We are not content with this minimal program. But it is seen as the first step toward the maximalization of Sabbath observance among the people. A journey around the world begins with a single step."

The respondents then turned to specific issues, and it was the resolution of these issues which marks a significant watershed in the Conservative teachings regarding Shabbat halakhah.

The problem of Sabbath observance is vastly complicated by the prohibition against the use of the automobile on the sacred day. Jews no longer live in compact neighborhoods where they can easily walk to the synagogue. In the large urban and suburban sprawl, total prohibition of the use of the motor car is tantamount to "rendering attendance at the synagogue on the Sabbath practically impossible for increasing numbers of people."

The other problem is the ban on the use of electricity on the Sabbath. Not being able to turn on electric lights or shut them off causes great inconvenience and discourages Sabbath observance, or, at least, so it was thought.

What is to be done?

Before the questions of riding to the synagogue and the use of electricity were dealt with, an illuminating discussion was presented by Dr. Robert Gordis on the historical and theological justification for flexibility and reversal of precedents in Jewish law.⁶ He points out that, in past periods of creativity, the masters of Jewish law sought to meet new times and situations with new rulings. The lines of his argument are familiar to readers of this journal as he has eloquently explicated them in various essays published here and elsewhere.⁷

The question of electricity on Shabbat is treated in the time-honored method of *teshuvot* — examination of the sources. The kindling and extinguishing of fire is prohibited on the Sabbath, and the question is where the turning on and turning off of electric lights fits the halakhic definition of fire.

In Jewish law there are two levels of prohibitions: *d'oraita* (prohibited by Pentateuchal law) and *d'rabbanan* (prohibited by rabbinic law). Reviewing the literature, the respondents found that there are, indeed, some authorities who believe that fire is prohibited by Pentateuchal law (*d'oraita*). However, there are some authorities who prohibit electricity as a rabbinic prohibition (*d'rabbanan*). The question (which might sound rather abstruse) is whether the filament is burning when the power goes into it. The respondents believed that even if there is a minute flame, the

6. *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly, 1950*, pp. 138-155.

7. See, especially, "A Dynamic Halakhah: Principles and Procedures of Jewish Law," *JUDAISM* (Summer, 1979).

“burning” is not intended by the person turning on the light. Thus, this puts the action in the halakhic category of *melakhah she-enah zrikah le-guffah* (a labor which is not needed by the actor for its outcome, in this case, the burning of the filament). Furthermore, since the power that causes the filament to burn comes from the city’s power station and the action of turning on the switch is, therefore, called a *geroma*, an indirect cause, the labor becomes only rabbinically prohibited. The result of all this recondite discussion is that the turning on and off of electricity is in the category of *shevut*, a rabbinically prohibited action. In the halakhah, a *shevut* may be set aside for the sake of the performance of a *mizvah*. “In modern times, the use of electricity is necessary for the proper observance of the joy of Sabbath.” Therefore, it should be permitted if it involves the enhancement of Sabbath observance.

Another authority⁸ saw not even a rabbinic prohibition in the use of electricity. He based his ideas on the observation that, scientifically, fire is one form of energy, while electricity is another.

It is interesting that one of the sources used by the respondents is an article on *Hadlakat Hashmal BeShabbat* (the kindling of electricity on the Sabbath) published in the Hebrew periodical *Simai* (Vol. 12, No. 3), by Rabbi S. Goronchick, chief chaplain of the Israel Army (later Shlomo Goren) who states: “Anything that does not produce a flame in the course of its burning is not fire.”

Using traditional halakhic methods of interpretation, the Rabbinical Assembly felt that, under most circumstances, electricity can be used on the Sabbath. This permission, of course, applies only to uses that do not involve other work prohibited on the Sabbath, such as cooking, baking, shaving with an electric razor, using a wash machine or an electric iron.

More controversial was the question of the use of an automobile on the Sabbath, specifically to travel to the synagogue. Here the Assembly was divided. The majority felt that travelling to the synagogue for services ought not be regarded as a violation of the Sabbath law. Their reasoning followed the line that the use of an automobile involved kindling of light, combustion of gasoline, and moving from one domain to another. All of these are prohibited activities on the Sabbath. As far as kindling of light, as we have already seen, this is not prohibited especially when it is done in order to perform a *mizvah*. As far as locomotion from one domain to another, this is not prohibited because, in order to invoke this prohibition, it is necessary to move from a *reshut ha-rabbim*, a public domain, to a private domain. Technically speaking, a public domain is defined as one which is identical with the Israelites’ camp when travelling through the wilderness. That wilderness “camp” numbered 600,000 adult male Jews. If there is any prohibition, it is again a *shevut*, which is, as pointed out above, superceded when a commandment must be performed. As far as combustion,

8. Rabbi Arthur Neulander, in a supplementary report.

this is prohibited only when it is for the purpose of cooking, heating or lighting. Obviously, these do not apply to an automobile engine. Since attending public worship is a *mizvah* which is an indispensable element in the preservation of American Jewry, the majority favored permitting the use of an automobile on the Shabbat.

This conclusion was opposed by a minority group which stressed the importance of remaining within one's own circle and community on the Sabbath. The use of a car might also involve the possibility of repairing the vehicle and of purchasing gasoline. If people cannot come to the synagogue, they argued, we must train them to find resources at home.

The majority stressed that permission to travel involved only attendance at worship and not travel for social purposes. Thus, using what was considered processes inherent in the law itself, the Conservative movement permitted the use of electricity and of the automobile on the Sabbath. These decisions were not binding on any one who disagreed with them, but they did have a far-reaching impact.

In spite of the electricity and the travelling issues, the Conservative movement has maintained an allegiance to the traditional *halakhah* of the Sabbath.

Prayerbooks and Services

Conservative Judaism has dealt with the Sabbath in other ways besides those which we have discussed.

First and foremost, the movement has been in the forefront of the effort to provide the modern Jew with meaningful and understandable liturgical materials. New prayerbooks have set the tone for most of the traditional synagogues in America today.

Noteworthy is the Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook, published in 1946. This *siddur* was prepared by a Joint Prayer Book Commission of the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue on the basis of the manuscript submitted by Rabbi Morris Silverman. It was novel both in its form and in its content and was directed to congregations that wished to preserve the traditional mode of worship, yet also wished to express their special needs and understanding. The Hebrew text of the *siddur* was translated anew and printed in a fashion which made it convenient to have responsive readings in English. Many supplemental readings were included to serve the worshipper (especially the one who was not especially familiar with Hebrew) to express his spiritual feelings. The prayerbook helped introduce decorum, dignity and congregational participation through English readings and congregational singing, and thereby set the tone for the modern traditional synagogue.

The Hebrew text was basically traditional, but with several important alterations. The editors eliminated the blessing, "Blessed art Thou . . . Who has not made me a woman." In dealing with the prayers for the

return of the animal sacrificial system, they changed the tense of two verbs and made a few other minor modifications. The restoration of animal sacrifice is not seen by modern Jews as a legitimate aspiration. Therefore, the new text speaks of the importance of the Temple in Jerusalem where our forefathers *once* offered sacrifices. Here is an instance where "reinterpretation is impossible and the traditional formulation cannot be made to serve our modern outlook."⁹ These changes are characteristic of the Conservative preference for reinterpretation rather than radical revision. As much of the traditional text is preserved as possible. Where "reinterpretation becomes impossible" changes are introduced. This prayerbook is now used in practically every Conservative synagogue, though a new version is now in preparation.

Another characteristic of many Conservative synagogues is the introduction of instrumental music into the Sabbath services. The Committee on Jewish Law, the halakhah-interpreting arm of the movement, stated:

The Law Committee is cognizant of the arguments in the halakhah for and against the use of the organ on the Sabbath and Festivals. But the Committee does not consider the use of the organ as halakhically prohibited.¹⁰

Of great importance was the introduction of the late Friday night service. This practice was very important in the Reform movement. The Conservative movement adopted it when it seemed that economic necessity made it difficult, if not impossible, to attend the synagogue on Saturday morning. This was an expression of the viewpoint that if people cannot observe the Sabbath in its traditional form, opportunities must be provided for them within the present possibilities. In many congregations the late Friday night service became the main worship experience.

In recent times there has been a growing dissatisfaction with the stress on the late Friday night service. The almost universal practice of the five-day week makes Sabbath morning services available to most people who want to attend, and there is also a growing recognition of the importance of the family celebrating Friday night at home with a festive meal and fellowship.

* * *

In assessing what the movement has done, it is clear that Conservative Judaism has been a strong force in the preservation of the Sabbath in this country. In many communities the sensitivity to the importance of the Sabbath and its observance has been maintained by the Conservative synagogue. There are multitudes who maintain such rituals as lighting of

9. Introduction to the *Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook*.

10. Seymour Siegel, "Summary of Decisions of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards on Shabbat and Yom Tov," available at the offices of the Rabbinical Assembly of America.

Sabbath candles, who attend Sabbath services and who have been educated to appreciate and to commit themselves to Sabbath observance because of Hebrew schools, Camp Ramah, USY and LTF. Excellent educational material has emanated from the organizations which make up Conservative Judaism.

Yet, the uneasiness of the colleague whose question stimulated the 1950 responsa on electricity and riding, is shared by the leaders of the Conservative movement. With all the strenuous effort, there does not seem to have been enough progress. There are still many for whom the beauties and profundities of Sabbath observance are strange and unknown. Much remains yet to be done. Though several intensive campaigns have been launched in the Conservative movement for Sabbath observance, the Sabbath queen reigns but does not rule for far too many. The leaders of the Conservative movement are dedicated to persist in their efforts to enrich American Judaism through the increased observance of Israel's most precious gift — the Sabbath.

*A Discussion on the Sabbath Between
Rabbi Akiba and Turnus Rufus*

Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiba, "What makes the Sabbath more important than all the other days of the week?"

Rabbi Akiba answered, "What makes you more important than other men?"

Turnus Rufus answered, "It is because the Emperor chose to honor me."

"This is equally true of the Sabbath," said Rabbi Akiba. "It is because the King of kings wishes to honor the Sabbath . . ."

"If God chooses to honor the Sabbath, then why does He not keep the wind from blowing, and the rain from falling, and the grass from growing on the Sabbath?" asked Turnus Rufus.

Rabbi Akiba answered, "In his own courtyard, a man is permitted by law to carry things on the Sabbath from one place to another. So is it with the Holy One, blessed be He. The whole world is His, and His glory is not shared by any other power. Hence He can permit these things even on the Sabbath" (*Gen. Rab.* 11.5).

Reform's Concern With The Sabbath

W. GUNTHER PLAUT

I

REFORM BEGAN AS A MOVEMENT WITH ONE clear purpose: to preserve Judaism in the post-Enlightenment diaspora. It addressed itself to the ever growing segment of Jewry who were ready to enter the outside world and leave the visible or invisible ghetto. Faced with a choice between an unaccommodating and unyielding traditionalism on the one side, and beckoning conversion with all its putative advantages on the other, Jews who wanted neither one nor the other searched for a secure ground on which they could stand as Jews in a modern age. The defection from Judaism was already in full swing and it was the historic function of the early reformers to stem this tide.

In the 170 years since then this has been one — though by no means the only one — of Reform's achievements: it has kept large numbers of our people in the fold by providing them with a religious alternative, which proclaimed that tradition was the starting point and linchpin of Jewish life, but that it needed molding to meet new conditions. This had been understood in the Talmudic stage of the halakhic process, and the reformers vowed to revivify it in the new era.

For the first generation or two, in Germany, and in the early stages of organized Ashkenazic community life in the United States as well, the reformers used halakhic precedent to chart their path. As long as this remained the case, their conservative and radical wings formed one phalanx. Only much later — in North America after 1880 — did the two wings separate into self-contained movements: the conservative reformers became "Conservatives," and the avant-gardists now were dubbed "Reform." It is important to keep this ideological genesis in mind, for the common ground has never shifted; only the stances have varied.

Nowhere has the struggle to maintain tradition in the face of external pressures been more evident than in the area of Sabbath observance. To put it differently, the Sabbath became in many ways paradigmatic. The development of Reform may be followed through the Sabbath discussions at many rabbinical and lay conferences. The poetic vision of Abraham Ibn Ezra was borne out time and again, *shemartikh b'khol yamim, lema'an shemartani meod meyemei ne-urim*, which Aḥad Ha-am rephrased into his oft-quoted statement about the crucial function of the Sabbath in Jewish life.¹

1. Ibn Ezra, *Iggeret Ha-Shabbat*; Aḥad Ha-am, *Al Parashat Derakhim*, III 30.

II²

Already at the Breslau meeting of the liberal rabbis, in 1846, the discussions concerning the Sabbath occupied a major portion of the conference. There was no question about the need to do something. The Sabbath was being violated, people were working, stores were open and services were poorly attended. Valiantly, rabbis tried to maintain the principle of Sabbath rest but there were no quick remedies. The new principle was: maintain the Sabbath according to tradition if you can, but, if you are unable, do what you must.

Where it is a question of one's total material welfare, where one's total possessions or the means of one's future existence are in question or threatened, a Jew (said Bernhard Wechsler) would not be transgressing a religious duty if he takes remedial measures, and where others cannot assist him attends to them himself.

He alluded to the rule of tradition, "Better that you should desecrate one Sabbath so that you observe many Sabbaths" — a rule which extended the excuse of *pikuah nefesh* (the saving of life) to economic coercion.³ Alas, no argument availed and many Sabbaths were desecrated. Nor could the ingenious *pilpul* of a Samuel Adler prevail: he tried to rescue the Sabbath on the shaky distinction of *kol melakhah* and *kol melekhet avodah*. His effort was as ineffective then as it would be today. It was, in fact, already then an anachronism.⁴

In 1871, the Augsburg synod proclaimed its brief Sabbath amendments to the Shulhan Arukh. They are worth repeating for, in part, they represented a position which, a hundred years later, was to be taken by the Conservative movement:

If the distance from the residence to the house of worship, or age and delicate health prevent attendance at divine service, it is permissible to remove this obstacle by riding to the place of the communal worship on Sabbath and holidays, either on the railroad or in a vehicle.

This permission extends also to the practice of charitable acts in such cases where delay would be dangerous.

The same permission holds where the purpose is educational or recreative. An Israelite is permitted to play the organ in the house of worship on the Sabbath.⁵

2. This section is based on the author's lecture, "The Sabbath in the Reform Movement," at the convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, June 17, 1965; CCAR Yearbook, LXXV 168 ff.; also in Joseph Blau, ed., *Reform Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1973), pp. 229-254.

3. *Mekhilla, Ki Tissa*; see also *Yoma* 85b. The discussion may be followed in the author's *The Rise of Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union of Progressive Judaism, 1963), p. 188.

4. Plaut, *Ibid.*, p. 189 f.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 195. *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America*, vol. XIV (1950), pp. 112 ff.: "One should refrain from all such activities that are not made absolutely necessary by the unavoidable pressures of life and that are not in keeping with the Sabbath spirit, such as shopping, household work, sewing, strenuous physical exercise, etc." (Responsum by Morris Adler, Jacob Agus, Theodore Friedman).

But while, in mid-nineteenth century Germany, the reformers were beginning to give up on such questions as work and business activities on the Sabbath and restricted themselves to the more malleable *halakhot* which surrounded synagogue worship, their American colleagues still had high hopes for some more thoroughgoing observance. Thus, Bernard Felsenthal, the first rabbi of Chicago Sinai Congregation, asserted that it *was* possible "to observe the religious law to withdraw the Sabbath from weekday work and to utilize it for the advancement and sanctification of the spirit, and therefore it must be observed."⁶

In Cincinnati, Isaac M. Wise and Max Lilienthal motivated several businessmen, all of them Reform Jews, to sign a public resolution which stated that they would unite their influence

to persuade all business men of our creed in this city to observe the Sabbath by abstaining from all business transactions. Resolved, that we in signing our names declare that we pledge our word to each other and to all, to keep our places of business closed during every Sabbath of ours; to transact no business ourselves, nor allow any . . . person in our employment to transact business for us on that day on our premises.⁷

There was only one condition: this compact, forerunner of a modern *havurah*, was to take effect only if twenty-five wholesale houses which were not then observing the Sabbath, would join themselves to the signatories. There is reason to believe that the full twenty-five were never found, and that spelled the end of a noble venture. In time, the American reformers followed the example of their German colleagues and began to concern themselves primarily with those Sabbath matters which appeared to lie in their rabbinic reach. First and foremost amongst these was attendance at Sabbath worship.

III

The pews were emptying or empty and no rabbi could overlook this all too obvious fact. Two radical remedial measures were the consequence of this dilemma and both were, for some time, the cause for bitter intramural controversy. I refer to the innovation of holding Sabbath services on Friday nights and to the institution and ultimate rejection of statutory Sunday worship (which was a sort of negative rescue).

The first to institute late Friday night services were Leopold Kleeberg in Louisville and Jacob Meyer in Cleveland. In 1869, Isaac Mayer Wise followed suit and established a 7:00 p.m. service.

It has been objected (he wrote) that many prefer the theatre and the opera to the Temple, and will go to those places of amusement in preference to the house of worship. Goodbye to you, ladies and gentlemen, we will see you

6. *Kol Korei Bamidbar, Über jüdische Reform* (Chicago, 1859), p. 10. See Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union of Progressive Judaism, 1965), pp. 269 ff.

7. Plaut, *Growth*, *loc. cit.*; also I.M. Wise, *Reminiscences* (Cincinnati: Leo Wise, 1901), p. 285.

again. Persons who have no higher than fictitious ideals, who prefer play to reality, self-deception to self-elevation, fiction to truth, amusement to instruction, the fleet shadow of the moment to the rock of eternity, persons who worship selfishness in lieu of the Eternal God will go almost anywhere. But we do not suppose we are mistaken in the bulk of our co-religionists if we maintain that the vast majority of them will visit the Temple when opportunity offers and go to hear artists some other evenings if they wish to hear them. Managers of theatres and operas will have to put off their gala evenings from Friday to Saturday evening.⁸

Wise encouraged the use of Friday nights for adult educational lectures and was pleased to record, a few years later, that the Sabbath eve worship idea had been widely accepted and, in his congregation at least, was a success. Wise was then already engaged in battling against the rising tide of Sunday services and exhorted his readers with the apotheosis “take care of Friday evening and it will take care of Judaism to be preserved intact.”⁹ (Several generations later those who did, indeed, take care of Friday nights could no longer be as sanguine about the Jewish condition.)

Not everyone was enamoured of the great night-time innovation. That the Orthodox would criticize it was to be expected, but they were not alone in opposing it. Wise claimed that only the supporters of the Sunday Sabbath would have no part of the Friday night service, but he failed to convince Reformers like Joseph Silverman and Kaufmann Kohler who, even after the turn of the century, thought that Reform’s total effort should continue to be directed towards strengthening Sabbath morning worship. Kohler called the Friday night experiment “an innovation of dubious character” and Silverman warned that “by some peculiar reasoning people believe that if they attended synagogue for 30 minutes Friday evening they are then keeping the Sabbath.”¹⁰ In this respect these men remained closer to the European tradition. There, Friday night services did not achieve the prominence that they had in America and, therefore, did not replace the morning worship as the chief service. The Guide Lines of 1912 — which were German liberalism’s Columbus Platform — still stressed total Sabbath observance and counselled that “all workday labour must be avoided” where possible.¹¹ A rabbi in a small community suggested that all members of the community should voluntarily assume a “Sabbath watch” and promise to attend one particular Sabbath morning a month, thus assuring the congregation of a minyan.¹²

This historic fight over the Sunday Sabbath, which began in America during the 1860s and lasted for fifty years was, if one is to believe the

8. *The Israelite*, Dec. 31, 1969.

9. *Ibid.*, July 11, 1873.

10. CCAR *Yearbook*, vol. XII (1902), pp. 145-46; vol. XV (1905), p. 62. See also Eugene Mihaly’s critique of evening worship, *Journal of the CCAR*, April 1965: 19 f.

11. Plaut, *Growth*, pp. 269 ff.

12. Siegfried Gelles, “Ein Vorschlag zur Sabbath-Heiligung,” *Liberales Judentum*, vol. 6 (1914), Nos. 6-7: 152 ff.

proponents of this shift, an attempt to rescue Jewish worship and, thereby, Judaism itself. They claimed that with daily prayers having disappeared and Saturday morning services being ever more poorly attended, the only recourse was to attract Jews to a Sunday service. Samuel Holdheim was the father of this idea,¹³ but while he found almost no supporters in Europe, the Sunday service movement spread in the United States and Canada. Its opponents did not deny that one could get larger attendance on a Sunday morning, but they believed that once Reform instituted Sunday as the chief worship day, two consequences would be inevitable: whatever little was left of Shabbat would be further attenuated and there would be a real danger of Reform becoming a schismatic sect.

On the other side, there were equally sincere advocates of regular Sunday services. Some, like Hyman G. Enelow, took up the old Holdheim argument and argued for an official transfer of the day of rest to the first day of the week. To the Central Conference he quoted the midrashic rule, "Fear not the Sabbath but Him who instituted it."¹⁴

In the end, it was the congregations themselves that saved the movement from the horns of the Sabbath dilemma. While the Central Conference of American Rabbis agreed to publish a special separate prayer service for Sunday worship, the pamphlet, separated from the main *Union Prayer Book*, appeared as a sectarian off-shoot and found no favour. The booklet saw no second edition and, instead, was given an unostentatious burial in the Reform cemetery.

It was not until 1937 that the matter of Sabbath observance reappeared as a main item on the agenda of the Central Conference. At that time, Israel Harburg delivered an address in which he traced the reasons for the silence of the movement on the subject and made a number of cogent observations.¹⁵ "First and foremost," he said, "we should free ourselves and others of the prevailing notion that Sabbath observance means exclusively attendance at Temple services." He reminded his colleagues that not only were worship practice or ceremonies at stake, but one's own attitude towards *mizvah* and *halakhah*. The Sabbath was the keystone of Jewish life, and what the Conference did with it would spell the success or failure of the Reform movement. But no action was taken at the Conference, and for nearly thirty years the matter rested there.

Meanwhile, two apparently disparate developments, each representing an important aspect of the Sabbath, began to operate independently. One was the dramatic and unforeseen return of Sabbath morning worship to the Reform movement. It came dressed in the garment of the Bar *Mizvah*, though Reform rabbis did not, and do not, always like what comes along with this reincarnation. But it was the formerly unwelcome Bar

13. Plaut, *Rise*, p. 192.

14. *Sifra* on Lev. 19:30. Enelow's address is found in *CCAR Yearbook*, vol. XIII (1903), pp. 168 ff.

15. *CCAR Yearbook*, XLVII (1937), pp. 324 ff.

Mizvah (many Reform congregations had abandoned the ceremony altogether in favor of Confirmation) who, with his breaking voice, imperfect Hebrew and his many relatives and friends gave the synagogue an entirely new lease on Sabbath morning celebration. To be sure, he did not restore the Sabbath to the movement but he opened the door for Sabbath morning worship.

The other important development was the reemergence of mizvah as a central concept in Reform Judaism. While it is no simple matter to trace the reasons for this reemergence, one of them surely was the series of meetings which a group of Reform and Conservative theologians held for several years at Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. These “covenant theologians” (of whom the writer was one) squarely placed mizvah on the agenda of the modern Jew as the greatest consequence of acknowledging the covenant to be central in Jewish life.¹⁶

It was inevitable that, sooner or later, the paradigmatic nature of the Sabbath would become the vehicle to bring the renewed concern with mizvot to the center of the Reform movement. In 1965, at the convention in Cincinnati, the writer gave a lecture on the subject “The Sabbath in the Reform Movement — Fact, Fiction, Future” and the Conference devoted an entire day exclusively to considering practical ways and means of recovering something of the day in an essentially secular society. In consequence, a Sabbath Committee was established and, after some years, produced a Shabbat Manual (*Tadrikh le-Shabbat*) which focussed on the whole span of Sabbath observance, from Erev Shabbat to Havdalah, provided rituals and readings, and produced a guide of *mizvot asseh* and *lo ta’asseh*. This was a first for the Reform movement, which had resolutely opposed any guides or codes for fear that they would create a new Orthodox environment in Reform dress. In Houston, in 1970, the Conference adopted the *Shabbat Manual* and thereby turned a historic corner. In time, another and more ambitious book appeared, *Shaarei Mitzvah*, which dealt with the life cycle of the Jew. Currently, a third volume, which deals with the festivals, is in preparation. A fourth one will attempt to address itself to the ethical mizvot.

To be sure, the basic tension between authority and freedom which is inherent in Reform Judaism is not solved by any guide. The latter starts with tradition and its authority but ultimately ends in the reassertion of freedom of the individual to make a committed choice. It is in the nature of Reform Judaism that this choice can be resolved only by the individual Jew, so that the movement will continue to retain its aspects of eclecticism.

IV

The *Shabbat Manual* attempted to free Sabbath observance from its identification with attendance at Sabbath services. While continuing to

16. These meetings, and their participants, are discussed in the author’s autobiography, *Unfinished Business* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1981).

stress the latter it also laid emphasis on other mizvot which one performed during the span of the day, both in the home and outside.

But a new problem is now facing the movement. There is a general acknowledgement of the unhappy fact that synagogue attendance on Friday nights is decreasing perceptibly and the trend gives no indication of reversal. To be sure, everywhere there is a core of faithful attenders, but where, some years ago, the percentage of synagogue members who would go on Friday nights with any regularity was estimated to be between eight to fifteen per cent of the membership, in most places the attendance has fallen below even this lowly number. Still, most rabbis continue to concentrate their major effort on the Friday evening service, and many of them feel that their rabbinic "success" is being judged by the numbers of people whom they can attract for worship. However, there are increasing numbers of Reform rabbis who feel that the end of the Friday night experiment is at hand. Begun in the 1860s, it may run its course after it has reached the proverbial age of one hundred and twenty. Instead, the renewed emphasis will be on home observance on Erev Shabbat and on a revitalized Shabbat morning service. Along with these will come the acknowledgement that one's personal life style, one's discipline of not doing and doing, represents *the* vital element in Sabbath observance.

A good many religious schools have already shifted from Sunday to Shabbat in order to unify the families in their attention to the day. Others make Shabbat the major day for adult education and utilize the afternoon especially for this purpose. Still others will maintain the occasional Friday evening for special lectures or musical observances, but it seems inescapable to this observer that Erev Shabbat is being returned to the home, and the rest of the day to worship and study.

V

However, these changes do not betoken a simple return to traditional practice. There will be a good deal of that, but that will not be all. Along with it will go a new view of the nature of the Sabbath. It was one thing in ancient days when resting for one day a week was deemed revolutionary and, in terms of social change, appeared downright dangerous to many Gentile societies where Jews dwelt. Rest upset a social order which demanded unceasing work from the lower classes and slaves.

Today, with a contracting work week and an increase of the senior population whose major occupation is recreation rather than work, the question of Sabbath rest assumes an entirely different proportion. Most people have a good deal of leisure and some have too much of it. Where, then, will traditional Sabbath rest find its anchorage? It can find it only if it is responding to the needs of modern society, of which the Jew is an ineluctable part.

Some years ago, in a lecture at Syracuse University, I called the new dimension of Sabbath observance "the Sabbath as protest."

If the Sabbath is to have any significance, it must confront one of modern man's greatest curses, his internal and external unrest. This unrest arises from the fact that today he leads a life without goals and, as a consequence, that he is involved in competition without end.¹⁷

Seen in this light, the Sabbath may be perceived as directing itself toward two major objectives. One would make the Sabbath a relief from, and protest against, the basic causes of unrest, a surcease from chasing the whirlwind, a stepping off of the treadmill of ordinary concerns. Even repeated leisure activities provide a treadmill of their own, without producing what Josef Pieper called "the inner source of leisure," the setting of goals that are both realistic and within reach, yet also beyond one's self.

The other objective would focus on endless competition as a specific form of goallessness. Everything is competitive today, yet the end is never quite defined. Our culture asks us to acquire and acquire ever more, but we are never told when we will have enough. Women are urged to beautify themselves for the sake not only of other women but also of men, but are never told to what end such competition is entered into. The Sabbath may be seen as a protest against all forms of competition, even when they come in attractive packages marked "self-advancement" or "self-improvement." In this respect Sabbath becomes a "useless" day. Our forefathers had a keen understanding of the fact that sleep on the Sabbath was a form of coming closer to God. We must once again understand that doing nothing, being silent and open to the world, letting things happen inside, can be as important as, and sometimes more important than, what we commonly call the useful.

It is this kind of approach to rest to which Reform is now beginning to turn, this kind of understanding which is slowly making its way in the movement. It is a rest that goes beyond the proscription of thirty-nine kinds of labor and beyond the prohibition to "create" anything on the seventh day. It is, in a new and different way, a search for the hidden God. *Havurot* are being established here and there that explore these dimensions and expand the permissible and even desirable means whereby the Sabbath becomes a day on which we resist and protest the wiles of the everyday. I have no question that a movement which finds itself always in some state of ferment will respond once again to the tension that authority and freedom present and for which the Sabbath has become a recurring paradigm. Reform lacks the certainties of Orthodoxy but knows the excitement of serving as an avant-garde of Judaism. The Sabbath of tomorrow will not be the Sabbath of yesterday, but the holiness of the day and of the One who created it will remain unchanged. In its various forms of purpose and observance the Sabbath will thus continue to exert its beneficent and guarding power over Israel in all its habitations.

17. B.G. Rudolph lecture, reprinted in A. Leland Jamison, ed., *Tradition and Change in Jewish Experience* (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1978), pp. 169-183.

The Sabbath in Reconstructionism *

JACOB J. STAUB

IN VIEW OF THE GENEROUS AMOUNT OF SPACE

which JUDAISM has devoted to Mordecai Kaplan and to the Reconstructionist movement, readers of this symposium are undoubtedly familiar with the fundamental aspects of Reconstructionist thought and understand what Mordecai M. Kaplan intended when he defined Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people. Thus, I shall begin with a presentation of only those aspects of the Reconstructionist approach to the Jewish tradition which are needed to gain insight into the Reconstructionist observance of the Sabbath.¹

First, Reconstructionists can be characterized as Jews who retain a strong commitment to living a Jewish life and to perpetuating a strong and meaningful Jewish tradition and who, at the same time, are convinced by the approach of the modern historian. The historical perspective regards the development of all religious traditions, including Judaism, as a function of the social, economic, political and cultural circumstances which confront the group as it develops its religious beliefs and practices. Thus, Reconstructionists do not regard the Torah's account of supernatural divine revelation or miraculous divine interventions into history as literal and objectively accurate representations of events in the life of Israel. Rather, the Torah, Written and Oral, is regarded as a document and tradition of human authorship which reflects the historically conditioned conclusions at which past generations of Jews arrived, based upon their quest to understand the ultimate meaning of their lives. The typical Reconstructionist remains uncertain about the part of the Sinaitic revelation and the *halakhic* system which can be said to be of divine origin.

* My presentation of the Reconstructionist view of the Sabbath should not be taken as an authoritative or official statement of the Reconstructionist movement. As I hope is clear from the article, the Reconstructionist approach to the Jewish tradition allows for, and even demands, diversity in interpretation. Rather, this presentation ought to be regarded as the approach of one graduate of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and follower of Kaplan, and, thus, as reasonably typical of those Jews who call themselves Reconstructionists.

1. For a full articulation of the Reconstructionist approach to Judaism, see Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York, 1934), recently republished by the Jewish Publication Society of America (Philadelphia, 1981). For a brief summary of Kaplan's life and thought, as well as a list of his other works, cf. Ira Eisenstein, *Preface to Reconstructionism* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1969), reprinted from *Great Jewish Thinkers of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Simon Noveck (B'nai B'rith Department of Adult Jewish Education, 1963).

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What is clear is that the Torah, in all of its components, is a human response to the divine and, as such, can be properly understood in its historical context.

In spite of the acceptance of this naturalistic historical perspective, Reconstructionists stress serious ritual observance as a central and indispensable part of Jewish life. This stems from the civilizational definition of Judaism which Reconstructionists employ. The essence of Judaism is not its abstract beliefs and exalted ethics. Rather, it is the whole of the culture which the Jewish people has evolved to express its view of reality — the languages, literature, art, music, and calendrical rhythm which have shaped the lives of Jews through the generations. To be Jewish, in Reconstructionist terms, is to identify with the past, present and future experiences of the Jewish people — to regard the entirety of the Jewish tradition as one's primary frame of reference for the structuring of one's reality and to commit oneself to the continuation of that tradition in ways which are appropriate and meaningful in the current era.

To accomplish this, a Reconstructionist seeks to effect, in Kaplan's terms, a "revaluation" of traditional practices.² That is, the Reconstructionist is committed to the revitalization of ritual observances through a study of the traditional meanings which these practices evoked and expressed. Through this study, the values and insights embedded in the *mizvot* and expressed in traditional terms can be reconstructed to reflect the contemporary idiom. This process involves a continuous wrestling with the tradition in which one seeks to empathize and identify with the experiences of past generations in their observance of the *mizvot*. In this way, their experiences can be incorporated into one's own life. In practice, this most often means that much of the form of the rituals is retained while their meaning is revalued in naturalistic terms which express a modern world view. In some cases, however, such as with regard to the equality of the sexes, ritual observances are modified and, in other cases, new ritual forms have been developed to express needs unmet by traditional observances.³

Thus, the Reconstructionist's observance of rituals, including the Sabbath, must be understood not as the observance of divinely revealed or rabbinically interpreted commandments. Without a belief that the Torah is the record of a supernatural divine revelation, and without a traditional Jewish communal structure which enforces the *halakhah* as the mandatory laws of the community, Reconstructionist observance is voluntaristic.

2. Cf. *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1962), pp. 1-39.

3. The most notable example is the institution of the *Bat Mizvah* ceremony, now widely accepted, at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism. A more recent example is the ceremony for baby girls, *B'rit B'not Yisrael*, which parallels the *B'rit Milah* for boys. See Sandy E. Sasso, "B'rit B'not Israel," in *Response* 18 (Summer, 1973): 101-105, and Sandy and Dennis Sasso, "B'rit B'not Yisrael," in *Moment* 1, 1 (May-June, 1975): 50-51.

Since rabbis no longer possess coercive authority, as they did prior to emancipation, and Jews voluntarily chose to affiliate with the Jewish community and to be ritually observant, rabbinic pronouncements are not regarded as authoritative. Rather, the Reconstructionist movement has sought to involve committed lay Jews in the process of revaluation of ritual observances.

Ritual observance is, thus, the outcome of the decision that one wants to maximize the Jewish content of one's life in order to tap into the spiritual heritage of the tradition and in order to transmit and enhance the Jewish tradition for future generations. It is an act of faith, not in the divinely revealed nature of the *halakhah*, but, rather, in the value of the way of life developed by past generations of Jews — both in the terms of the enrichment of one's personal life and in terms of the improvement of the world. It is based on the conviction that the specific genius of the Jewish tradition cannot be abstracted as ethical principles or insights of truth. As a civilization, Judaism's civilizing power is embedded in its culture. Thus, my goal in observing rituals is to live, as much as possible, in Jewish space, in Jewish time, and with the Jewish view of the world which is created for me when I follow the Jewish liturgical, calendrical and ritual cycles.⁴

Obviously, the observance of the Sabbath plays a central role in the life of all Reconstructionists. Kaplan's initial revaluation of the meaning of the Sabbath begins with the rabbinic statement that the Sabbath offers a "foretaste of the world to come." Shifting the emphasis from other-worldly to this-worldly salvation, the Sabbath is designed to help us create a recurring period of time in which we can experience the self-realization and peace which is the ultimate end of our lives — a time in which we can be released from the anxieties and preoccupations of our everyday lives so that we can deepen our awareness of our personal goals and our goals for our community. More specifically, Kaplan elaborates upon three traditional meanings associated with the Sabbath. As a recollection of the works of creation, he suggests, the Sabbath ought to symbolize the everpresent possibility of creativity and self-renewal — the Jewish rejection of fatalism and hopelessness. As a day of holiness, it reminds us of the sacredness of life, helping us to evoke in ourselves and others the divine image in the human personality. As a sign of the covenant, it spurs us on to fulfill our responsibility of partnership with the divine forces inherent in the world.⁵ Though these midrashic suggestions are not authoritative in Reconstructionism, they are presented here as examples of the ways in which Recon-

4. For a more complete discussion of the Reconstructionist approach to ritual observance, cf. *A Guide to Jewish Ritual*, edited by Ira Eisenstein (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1962). Cf. also Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization*, Part Six, and *The Future of the American Jew* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1967), pp. 413-428.

5. Cf. *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, pp. 40-103. Also cf. Ira Eisenstein, *The Sabbath* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1961).

structionists would proceed in reconstructing the meaning of the Sabbath.

In general, Reconstructionists have emphasized the Sabbath morning service as the pivotal time for community worship. The service is usually shortened by the abridgement of the preliminary psalms and often by the elimination of the *Musaf* service. Also, it is standard practice to incorporate contemporary readings and other materials into the service to make the traditional idiom of the *tefillot* more accessible. A relatively large amount of time is devoted to the reading and the discussion of the weekly Torah portion, which is usually read on the triennial cycle. In place of a sermon, a congregational discussion usually takes place in which all members have an opportunity to engage in *Talmud Torah*, reacting to and interpreting the *parashah*. The *Reconstructionist Guide to Jewish Ritual* is as emphatic as it gets in stressing the importance of community worship on Sabbath morning as a way of developing community cohesiveness.⁶

Though Reconstructionist congregations often hold late Friday evening services, the tendency has been to preserve Friday evening as a family time in which the rituals and *zemirot* of the meal are augmented by family discussions of Jewish texts geared to the age-level of the participants. Kaplan formalized this approach, inherent in his earliest writings, in a 1972 article proposing the institution of a Sabbath Eve Seder, modeled on the Passover Seder. Such a Seder would serve as a way of educating adults and children alike in the Jewish tradition and would provide children with a firm emotional link to Jewish study embedded in the family structure.⁷ In addition to increasing numbers of Reconstructionist families for whom the Friday evening meal is a time for Jewish study, this proposal has been instituted in modified form by Reconstructionist educators who bring the families of students together on a regular basis for a Sabbath Eve Seder in the synagogue.⁸ Kaplan's proposal has also led to the recent publication by the American Jewish Committee of *A Shabbat Haggadah*, edited by Michael Strassfeld.⁹

Aside from these formal programs, the Reconstructionist's Sabbath is a day of rest, though the traditional definition of rest is most often modified. The Sabbath is regarded less as a time in which set activities are prohibited and more as an opportunity to engage in activities which develop ties to one's family and to the Jewish heritage. To be sure, vocationally related activities and such things as shopping and housekeeping are to be avoided in that one's goal is to inhabit a world free of everyday distractions and to focus one's consciousness upon the true

6. Cf. *A Guide to Jewish Ritual*, pp. 14–21.

7. "The Sabbath Eve Seder: An Indispensable Innovation" in *Reconstructionist* 38, 2 (3/17/72): 17–20. Also cf. *Judaism as a Civilization*, pp. 443–447.

8. See, for example, Joel and Rebecca Alpert, "The Shabbat Seder Program" in *Creative Jewish Education: A Reconstructionist Perspective*, edited by J.L. Schein and J.J. Staub (forthcoming).

9. Institute of Human Relations Press, American Jewish Committee, 1981.

purposes of one's existence. Also, the tradition of Torah study on the Sabbath is emphasized. On the other hand, many Reconstructionists choose to ignore traditional prohibitions of such activities as athletics, gardening, instrumental music, and attendance at cultural events because they believe that these activities contribute to the enhancement of an *Oneg Shabbat* atmosphere.¹⁰ When framed in the context of a family day which includes Shabbat rituals, festive meals, Torah study and participation in synagogue worship, these traditionally prohibited activities can assume a Sabbath function — in the words of the Reconstructionist *Guide to Jewish Ritual*, broadening our horizons, humanizing us, deepening our roots within our family and people, and creating a distinction between the work of the week and the rest of the Sabbath.¹¹ In all cases, refraining from specific activities is seen as a means to the end of the creation of a Sabbath atmosphere and are not viewed as absolutes. Thus, travel to synagogue, for example, or to the home of family or friends for a meal is often regarded as constructive to the Sabbath atmosphere, even though it is traditionally prohibited.

The level and species of a Reconstructionist's Sabbath observance, as with all of her or his ritual observance, will vary according to background, education, personality, and other factors. Without the mandate of divine revelation, the Reconstructionist is not in a position to pass authoritative judgment upon the level of ritual observance of his or her neighbors. S/he is in a position to share personal experiences and to say, "It is my experience that maximizing my observance of the Sabbath has deepened the meaning of my life" and to encourage others to follow the example. Reconstructionists are united in the creative tension that they experience between the precedent of the past and the needs of the present. To call oneself a Reconstructionist is to acknowledge that tension and to commit oneself to struggling with it. In Rosenzweig's terms, we are all on the outside, disrupted in our Jewish identity by the phenomenon of political emancipation, seeking our own paths back to the center, attempting to learn to hear the music to which our ancestors danced quite naturally.¹²

When I present my rationale for my observance of the Sabbath or of *kashrut*, for example, to non-Reconstructionists, I am faced most often with two challenges. The first takes the form of an apprehensiveness about the anarchy to which personal decisions about ritual observance can lead. The second expresses puzzlement about how I, as a Reconstructionist, can attribute sanctity to practices which I do not believe are of divine origin.

10. See, for example, Sidney H. Schwarz, "Shabbat and Re-Creation" in *Reconstructionist* 46, 6 (10/80): 26–28. Schwarz suggests as criteria for Sabbath observance the establishment of a distinction (*havdalah*) between Sabbath and weekday activities, and the pursuit of activities which enhance the well-being of the world (*tikkun olam*).

11. *A Guide to Jewish Ritual*, p. 14.

12. Franz Rosenzweig, "The Builders," in *On Jewish Learning*, edited by N.N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1955).

Often, the misgiving about anarchy is founded upon what I regard as an inauthentic need for order, uniformity and regulation. So many American Jews demand that their rabbis stand firmly for *halakhic* principles — not because they take rabbinic authority seriously in their own *halakhic* observance, but because they think that their rabbis ought to stand for something to which they can easily point.¹³ The fact is that ritual observance among American Jews long ago crossed the line of anarchy. The Reconstructionist program is not designed to seduce *halakhically* observant Jews away from ritual observance. It is meant to provide non-observant Jews who cannot accept the traditional *halakhic* rationale with a means of re-entering the tradition. Diversity in ritual observance would seem to be unavoidable in view of the religious voluntarism which exists in American society. It is an unavoidable consequence of our inability to regard the *halakhah* as authoritative and of our recognition of the autonomy of individual persons.

The more serious basis of the challenge of anarchy is that which questions the way in which Reconstructionists appear to establish their own judgment and the values of the modern era as the ultimate criteria for evaluating the worth of traditional beliefs and practices. Kaplan's apparently certain faith in the values of the modern world seem dated and overly optimistic, especially when viewed in light of the Holocaust.¹⁴

In fact, the Reconstructionist approach to ritual observance is easily divorced from the overlay of Kaplan's faith in the potential of human reason. I personally do not believe with certainty that the modern, scientific, naturalistic view of reality is an evolutionary development superior to previous Jewish constructions of reality. Any kind of certainty in the promise of Western civilization in the modern era is unwarranted after the Holocaust. I am not prepared to state with certainty that the Documentary Hypothesis is correct and the doctrine of *Torah Mi-Sinai* is incorrect, nor that all the events in my life and the life of Israel can be explained scientifically, without reference to providence. What I do insist upon as a Reconstructionist is that I cannot avoid a self-conscious awareness of my own premises and the premises of my ancestors. I find the historical view of Jewish civilization inescapable. I cannot begin to accept the assertion that divine revelation occurs independent of human beings who hear, interpret and record it from their own limited perspective. As a consequence, I cannot avoid the tension between the past and the present which I have described above. Thus, I have no choice but to acknowledge humbly my own view of reality and to relate to the Jewish tradition based

13. For an interesting discussion of this phenomenon, see Charles S. Leibman, *The Ambivalent American Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976).

14. See, for example, the critique of Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust" in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?*, edited by Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1977), pp. 7–55. Greenberg's criticism of modernistic, enlightenment faith after the Holocaust does not single out Reconstructionism, but it certainly includes it.

upon my own view of reality and to relate to the Jewish tradition based upon my own personal need to identify with the Jewish people.

Though in one sense I do set up my own judgment as the criterion for evaluating the Jewish tradition, in another sense I believe that I am subjecting myself to that tradition, allowing it to work upon me and transform me. Uncertain as I am about the nature of God and His relationship to human affairs, my commitment to observe and to study as much of the tradition as I can, and to broaden my observance incrementally as that becomes possible for me, reflects what I believe is a quest for, and an openness to, the experience of the divine presence in my life. If I am correct, then Reconstructionism has served, at least in my own case, as a corrective to a self-assured modernistic view of the world.

My response to the second challenge noted above follows directly. I can never hope to invest the Sabbath, for example, with a sanctity identical to that with which my grandparents invested it. It is, nevertheless, a constant source of amazement to me that my observance of the Sabbath (as well as of other rituals) has, in the course of regular observance and conscious efforts at "reevaluation," assumed a central role in my life. It dictates the rhythms of my consciousness, plays an indispensable part in my family relationships, and is crucial to my identity as a Jew and a human being. The time that transpires from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday is radically and tangibly different from the other six days of the week. Vocational activity, for example, is unthinkable for me. I think different thoughts and relate to the world in a different way. If the term "sacred" entails the separateness implied in the word *kedushah* and designates actions which enable one to tap into the power of the events which rituals are supposed to reenact, then I believe my observance of the Sabbath is a sacred action. I can thus assert with confidence that it is possible to sanctify one's life — to live in A.J. Heschel's "architecture of time" — without a belief in the divinely ordained and mandatory nature of *halakhic* observance.

The Sabbath Angels

It was taught that Rabbi Jose ben Rabbi Judah said, "Two ministering angels escort man on the eve of Sabbath from the synagogue to his home. One of these angels is a good one, and the other an evil one. When the man comes to his house and finds the Sabbath lights kindled and the table set, the good angel says, 'May it be thus the next Sabbath,' and the evil angel, against his will, says 'Amen.' But if he does not find his home thus prepared, the evil angel says, 'May it be thus the next Sabbath,' and the good angel, against his will, says 'Amen'" (*Shab.* 119b).

Jewish Secularism and the Sabbath

ISRAEL KNOX

FOR THE SAKE OF CLARITY AND FAIRNESS

it must be stressed that Jewish secularism is not a synonym for assimilation; it is not a truancy from Jewish life with a mask on its face. It is not the “secularism” of those who claim to be Jewish merely by the “accident” of birth, who evince no interest in any aspects of Jewish existence and culture at all.

What, then, is Jewish secularism? It affirms that Jewish reality is pluralistic, within religion and within the community, and hence cannot be equated solely with formal religion and its institutionalized expression which is the synagogue. It draws a sharp distinction between *Judaism*, as the religion of Jews, and *Jewishness*, as comprising the totality of our historic experience — social and economic, ethical and cultural. Jewish secularism extracts from Judaism its national content and holds that its theological components are a matter of private choice, the prerogative of the individual to accept or reject, but, in either case, as no longer an indispensable condition for Jewishness.

Jewish secularism, as a cause and movement, thrived in the first half of the century, especially in the earlier decades, both in Eastern Europe and in America. Large-scale Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe to America began exactly one hundred years ago, and a segment of it consisted of young people who had already avowed secularism or turned to it in the new country. They spoke Yiddish, and there was a touch of religious fervor in their devotion to Yiddish literature. Most of them were enchanted with the socialist hope — their equivalent for the traditional Messianic expectancy — of a righteous and compassionate society, and some combined into a single unified ideal the socialist dream and the national aspirations of Zionism.

The adherents and practitioners of secularism (they called it *velt-lechlkait*) founded Yiddish afternoon schools, helped to build a Yiddish press (newspapers and journals), supported the Yiddish theater, and established Yiddish-speaking organizations with a secular orientation.

The premise of Jewish secularism involved a number of problems that were inherent in its very nature. The Jewish people and its religion appeared simultaneously upon the landscape of our planet and they grew up together in a dialectical relationship. Christianity and Islam, for exam-

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ple, were, in the main, imposed upon, or appropriated by, diverse peoples at various times and in various places *ready made*, and were adapted to, or commingled with, their extant culture, although they undoubtedly influenced their subsequent history and shaped their civilizations. To be a Jew always meant to belong to two categories — to a people and to an idea. And the two categories were truly one, like bones and skin, and not like the body and a garment which is an external thing and can be discarded at will. *Umah*, the people, and *Emunah*, its religion, went together, and in the perspective of history *Emunah* is not solely religion in the conventional sense, but the comprehensive and synoptic vision of man's (and woman's) role and worth in the community and in the cosmic order. The task of Jewish secularism should not be to destroy this unity, but to reinterpret it in consonance with a humanist-ethical and naturalistic world-perspective.

Bereft of tradition, Jewish secularism was unable to create a *nusach*, a set of ceremonies and holidays, for it is tradition that generates and nourishes a *nusach*, a "style of life," and produces purpose and direction. Ceremonies and holidays were not ignored in the schools, but only as narration, as a *telling from memory*, not as a direct and intimate experience, rather as a looking in from the outside, as through a window, without entering the sanctuary itself. The teachers and parents had the memory of what once was for them an authentic and ineluctable experience, but the children were given a report, the memory of a memory.

The secularists were concerned with some of the holidays, but paid little attention to the Sabbath, and its lot among them was a sad one. This was due, in part, to factors in the larger environment where Saturday had been, until recently, a work-day, and in part because even among those who observed the Sabbath it began and ended with the services in the synagogue, and seemed to lose something of the beauty and holiness which had enveloped the Sabbath from Friday evening to Saturday sunset in the *shtetlakh* of Eastern Europe. It was as if the Sabbath in America took on the character of Erev-Sunday, which was the common rest-day, and, therefore, the occasion for visiting friends and family, or for playing tennis and golf, for gatherings and meetings of *landsmanshaftn*, of branches of fraternal organizations, and, in general, for having a "good time."

The secularists were, after all, secularist and did not feel compelled to fashion their own mode and pattern for the Sabbath in an atmosphere that was not usually conducive to *aliyat neshamah*, an elevation of the soul, to *menuhah*, that peace and wholeness of the mind (which God created on the seventh day). What the secularists had witnessed in their youth, in the homes and *shtetlakh* of Eastern Europe, was a Sabbath that did not supplant the week, the *voch*, but made the *voch shabesdik*, whereas here they thought that the *voch* made the *Shabbes*, the Sabbath, *vochedik*.

Yet there was ample reason to prompt and inspire Jewish secularists, particularly those with a socialist and democratic orientation, to design a

formal structure for the celebration of the Sabbath. Of all the holidays, the Sabbath was nearest to their political and social philosophy, as if God had them in mind when he ordained the fourth commandment: "Six days shalt thou labour . . . the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any manner of work . . . nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates." The invocation of God's name need not have embarrassed secularists whose primary aim was social justice. How else would it have been possible to propose and enact such a commandment in a world where slavery was pervasive, where the man of toil was sunk in poverty, where the Sabbath, the notion of a day of rest, was denounced by the nations of the world as an excuse for laziness.

Seventy years ago Chaim Zhitlovsky, a founding father and theoretician of modern Jewish secularism, wrote an essay (in Yiddish) entitled, "The National-Poetic Rebirth of the Jewish Religion," in which he depicted the Sabbath as

the sacred *social* holiday in which there was realized for the first time, to a certain degree, the *right to rest* for the slave and the worker. Humanity does not yet have and cannot have the right to rest, not until the foundations of society will be rebuilt in accordance with the principle of socialism. The Jewish people ought to be proud that the first seeds, out of which sprouted the modern socialist ideal, were planted in its prophetic literature, and the ideal was realized insofar as the impulse to justice of that time permitted it, in many of its social institutions.

Chaim Zhitlovsky was circumspect and located the fulfillment of his utopia in the future, and credited the prophetic literature only with its seeds. Nonetheless, even his view, novel and perhaps daring in his time, had no immediate effect, and was not implemented by his own disciples.

With the rise of the afternoon-schools, in the second decade of this century, the question of holidays could not be avoided or side-stepped. Since the religious element in Jewish holidays cannot be expunged without impoverishing them, without depriving them of their very essence, the simplest solution was just to *talk about them*. What knowledge of the holidays the children acquired was oblique, a recollection by others of the past as now related to them, that is, a knowledge by description rather than by acquaintance, as a *present* experience.

Of all the holidays, the Sabbath should have been the least controversial among the secularists. It is one of the brightest jewels in the crown of Judaism as a religion in which the ideal is rooted in the natural, or, putting it another way, in which the natural is infused with spirituality, in which the transcendental ideal is to be embodied in the historic process, in which holiness is to live in God and in the world simultaneously. In that vision, God is the great beyond in the midst of our existence, a process and a power that impels us to deeds of righteousness — "righteousness, righteousness, shalt thou pursue" and renders righteousness, *mizvah* and hap-

piness compatible, well-nigh indivisible. This is humanism at the noblest level, and abounds in the liturgy of the Sabbath and is its inner melody, its *niggun*.

In our contemporary Western civilization the issue — a day of rest — has assumed another dimension of significance. The perplexing challenge now is what to do with the days — not merely a day — of rest, how to use them so as to enrich our lives, that is, how to *sanctify leisure*! In the *shtetlakh* of Eastern Europe there was no tension between them. Rest on the Sabbath did not imply passivity, but an activity of the spirit, the heightening of the soul in prayer, study, meditation. The clocks were not stopped on the Sabbath; there was no suspension of time, but a hallowing of it. The holiness and beauty of the Sabbath did not swallow up the week with its necessary work, but left over enough light to confer upon it a quality of *shabesdikait*.

The concept of the Sabbath as a foretaste of the world to come, of *olam haba*, of a world yet to be — not in heaven but here on earth — with man as partner in bringing it about, was not alien to Jewish tradition. Jewish secularism, with its socialist predilection, could have easily — and should have gladly — appropriated it for its own naturalistic eschatology. Indeed, Moses Hess, the forerunner of Socialist Zionism, in his *Rome and Jerusalem*, portrayed with prophetic eloquence and passion what he chose to call the “natural Sabbath” and the “historical Sabbath:” the former as the Sabbath of *Genesis*, betokening the completion of the physical world, the latter as the “ethical Sabbath,” yet to be, but with the going toward it and the goal as one (because the future comes one day at a time). This ethical and historical Sabbath would signify the world’s liberation from the prison-house of hatred, cruelty, and war, and its commitment to peace, loving-kindness, and justice for all. And then the *shofar* will re-sound throughout the universe: Behold the historical Sabbath has arrived, man’s redemption is not an illusion.

The doctrine of *olam haba*, a world to be, in a naturalistic setting, must have been close to the hearts and minds of Jewish secularists with a revolutionary *yiches*, stature, from czarist Russia. But they were reluctant to pour their wine into the old bottles and apparently unprepared to shape new ones. So the Sabbath was not moulded into a *nusach* with their own signature, was not enshrined in symbols and ceremonies to carry over into the lives of their children.

But the Jewish secularists *were* Jewish. They spoke a Jewish language, Yiddish (and without a Jewish language the door to assimilation is inevitably at least a little open), a language whose very words, especially those of Hebraic and Aramaic origin, and whose idioms were permeated with tradition. And after the dark night of the Holocaust, and the proclaiming of the State of Israel, the gap between secularism and tradition shrank.

There are only a few, if any, proponents of secularism who are engaged in battle against religion. There are a sizable number who are

a-religious, but are not averse to tradition out of national-historical motives, and there are many who are anxious to achieve a synthesis of secularism and tradition. The *oneg shabbat* is a feature of Friday evening or Saturday afternoon gatherings, and the "third" *seder* is a grand event (by referring to it as the third *seder* there is the presupposition that it is not intended to replace the first and second *seder*). But, above all, the entire mood and attitude toward tradition and holidays has changed favorably. The offices of Jewish-secular organizations are closed on *Rosh HaShanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and on both days, or at least on the first day, of *Pesah*, *Shavuot* and *Sukkot*.

There is an anecdote about a Jew who was renowned in his *shtetl* and surrounding vicinity as a staunch *apikores*, a non-believer. Nonetheless, he continued to go to *shul* every morning with *talis* and *t'fillin*, and to *daven* with ardor. When he was asked to explain the glaring paradox, his reply was simple: "Sure enough, I am an *apikores*, but on becoming an *apikores* I did not cease to be a Jew." The *apikores* was alone in his *shtetl*, and so he resorted to the *nusach* of tradition. If Jewish secularism is to survive it must evolve a *nusach*, neither as a duplicate of "conventional" tradition nor as a repudiation of it, but as a reinterpretation of it in the spirit of an ethical humanism and a naturalistic world-perspective. In such a constellation the Sabbath would be the brightest star.

Sabbath Spice

The Roman Emperor [Hadrian] asked Rabbi Joshua ben Hanania, "Why is it that Sabbath dishes have such a fragrant scent?"

Rabbi Joshua answered, "We put in a certain spice called Sabbath."

The Emperor said, "Please give me some of that spice."

Rabbi Joshua answered, "It is effective only for those who keep the Sabbath" (*Shab.* 119a).

Toward a Renewal of Sabbath Halakhah

PHILLIP SIGAL

I. Introductory Comments

The Sabbath has always been central in Judaism. It is not necessary here to document how often in scripture it is referred to as *kadosh* (holy), *brit* (a covenant), *le'olam* (forever), and *ledorot* (for all generations). It is theologically perceived as both a commemoration of the creation of the world (Ex. 20:8–11), and of God's redemption of Israel (Deut. 5:12–15), thus affirming God's cosmic role as Creator and Redeemer. The two poles are alluded to in a statement attributed to R. Judah haNasi, that when a person observes a Sabbath precisely as one should, it is as if he has observed every Sabbath from creation to resurrection.¹

Although the Sabbath stands in this way at the theological center of Judaism, the precise form of observance required at any given time did not attract the loyalty of all segments of Judaism. From the Mosaic narrative of the wood-gatherer who was put to death for gathering wood on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32–36), through the early prophets to Ezekiel's chastisement for the profanation of the Sabbath (Ez. 20, etc.), some people found it difficult to abide by a strict Sabbath obligation. Nevertheless, the Sabbath took on even greater importance after the trauma of 587 B.C.E., as a means of intensifying religious life in the absence of the sacrificial cult, and the Sabbath was seen as a means to "grasping the covenant" (Is. 56:2). It remained vital for Samaritanism, for the complex groupings of *perushim*, variously known as Essenes, Qumranites, Therapeutae and Pharisees, for the acculturated hellenistic Jews of Alexandria and the hellenistic diaspora, as well as for the proto-rabbinic Jews of Judah, Galilee and Babylonia. The stringencies that are reflected in Nehemiah (10:32; 13:15–22), effectively extended the biblical sense of "work" from agriculture to commercial activity, and Nehemiah possibly became the first person to extend the "blue laws" to non-Judahites, and to shut down a whole city for one day a week. These stringencies were soon escalated by the norms of The Book of Jubilees and the Dead Sea scrolls. It is impossible to understand the rabbinic Sabbath without taking into account the Sabbath of the pietistic groups reflected in this literature.²

1. *Mekhilta de R. Ishmael*, ed. Jacob Z. Lauterbach (Philadelphia: 1949), III, 204.

2. For a discussion of these varieties of Judaic religious expression and a reconsideration of who the Pharisees were, see Phillip Sigal, *The Emergence of Contemporary Judaism, From Origins to the Sixth Century*, Vol. I, Pt. 1, *From Origins to the Separation of Christianity*; Pt. 2, *Rabbinic Judaism* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1980). The Sabbath is seen to be of critical importance to

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The proto-rabbis labored at devising principles that would alleviate these stringent interpretations of scripture, but rabbinic Judaism ultimately absorbed much of the halakhah that arose from the pietistic circles originating under the aegis of Ezra and Nehemiah, and later proliferated in opposition to the acculturating movements of the hellenistic era. That the Sabbath was central even in the hellenistic diaspora, however, we can ascertain from Philo's frequent discussions of the Sabbath, and his advocacy of a highly halakhic standpoint.³

Ultimately, rabbinic Judaism gained hegemony and, with the advancing centuries, it continued to build upon the Sabbath halakhah. The stringencies that were designed as interpreting the intent of the core Sabbath halakhah, the thirty-nine *ʿabot melakhah*, proliferated massively.⁴ This corpus of halakhah, which grew from the tannaitic period on into what modern scholars consider unmanageable proportions, is incorporated into one-hundred and seventy-four chapters with one thousand, three hundred and three paragraphs reflecting thousands of detailed halakhic norms in Joseph Karo's *Shulḥan Arukh*. It is this mass that was inherited by those who founded the Positive-Historical movement in Judaism in the nineteenth century which, ultimately, became the Conservative Movement. And unless and until the formally authorized collective body or persons of this movement indicate that a segment of the corpus, or an individual halakhah, is inoperative, abolished or modified, the assumption is that the adherents of Conservative Judaism are bound to it. As of the time of this writing, a person would be hard put to discover which, if any, of the thousands of halakhot are no longer operative.⁵ And this is so, despite the vast multiplication of the strictures in the *Shulḥan Arukh* by successive commentaries and *poskim* (decisors) since 1600.⁶ A

those circles that produced and lived by the Book of Jubilees. See Jub. 1:10; 2:17-33; 50:6-13. See also Sigal, *Op. cit.* on the Sabbath in Jubilees, Vol. I, Pt. 1, 247f.; Qumran, 297-302; 341-348, notes 43-55. See also pp. 408-413, on the Sabbath and Jesus, and my comprehensive discussion of the Sabbath in my dissertation, *The Halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth According to the Gospel of Matthew*, available through University Microfilms International, at Ann Arbor, Mich.

3. *Decalogue* 20 (96-100f.); *Special Laws II*, 15-16 (56-70); 45 (249-251); *Moses II*, 39 (209-220); 4 (20-22); *On Creation* 43 (128); *On Migration of Abraham* 16 (91), and elsewhere. All references to Philo are from the Greek text in the Loeb Classical Library.

4. M. *Shab.* 7:2. The proliferating stringencies went by the name of *toledot*, "derivatives." The Torah never alludes to 39 categories, and a tannaitic source at M. *Hag.* 1:8 views the evolving practices as less than justifiable. See also T. *Hag.* 1:9; T. *Er.* 11:23. See Sidney B. Hoenig, "The Designated Number of Kinds of Labor Prohibited on the Sabbath" *JQR*, 68 (April, 1978): 193-208.

5. A book by a late member of the Law Committee, Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: 1978), preserves an abridged digest of medieval halakhah translated into English with little originality and creativity to offer to the contemporary sophisticated Jew; the recent book, *Conservative Judaism and Jewish Law*, ed. Seymour Siegel (New York: 1977), contains no new Sabbath halakhah, and wisely refrains from republishing the old *teshuvot* (responsa) on electricity and riding which are already found in *Tradition and Change*, ed. Mordecai Waxman (New York: 1958).

6. Such halakhic works as *Arukh Hashulḥan*, *Hayyeh Adam*, *Mishnah Berurah* and the Lubavitch *Shulḥan Arukh de Rab* are examples of more recent halakhic digests accepted as

major segment of the Conservative Movement still lacks knowledge that its formal halakhic body, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, permitted the use of electricity and riding to the synagogue on the Sabbath over thirty years ago, and instrumental music over twenty years ago. But beyond these landmark modifications one cannot discover a coherent statement that releases the Jew from his obligation to innumerable restrictions and the infinite complexities of such aspects of Sabbath halakhah as the categories of *tiltul* (carrying), and *mukzah* (handling items that are to be set apart). Similarly, there has been no cohesive articulation of a more relevant, contemporary halakhah of healing, leisure, travel and vacation.⁷

Many years ago, Boaz Cohen wrote that the detailed restrictions on carrying items on one's person such as a handkerchief, key, umbrella or a watch can hardly any longer be viewed as a Sabbath violation. But the Law Committee has never pursued the ramifications of such perspectives, and has not updated the mass of halakhic stringencies in these or similarly obsolete areas of Sabbath practice.⁸ As a consequence, there is no corpus of Sabbath halakhah that a contemporary rabbi can seriously attempt to persuade his people to observe, or that contemporary Jews can take seriously if they love music, photography, travel, gardening, and the like, either as recreation or as hobbies. Most moderns cannot find true spiritual inwardness, or intellectual awakening in the old restrictive quiescent Sabbath, and they require an alternative approach. The crucial need before the Conservative Movement is a restudy of the Sabbath halakhah.⁹ In 1971, I wrote that the problem is the lack of willingness "to reexamine categories of work, definitions of terms, and criteria of halakhah within the context of contemporary thought and the current lifestyle."¹⁰ It is to undertake a prolegomenon to that formidable objective that this paper is directed

II. *Toward a New Understanding of Melakhah*

The human being requires opportunity to contemplate life and to draw near to God, but few moderns are convinced that a restrictive twenty-four hour period is a desideratum to fulfill this objective. Although the Pentateuch teaches that God ceased from His *melakhah*, from

"authoritative" by Orthodoxy, and concerning which the teachers of Conservative halakhah have made no contrary statement.

7. See n. 5.

8. Boaz Cohen, "The Shulhan Arukh as a Guide for Religious Practice Today," *Conservative Judaism*, ed. Siegel, p. 93.

9. This is a project that I have urged and offered to undertake for well over a decade. See Phillip Sigal, *New Dimensions in Judaism* (Jericho, N.Y.: 1972), pp. 52-56, 119-127, 132, 216f., n. 19, etc.; see also index entry "Sabbath."

10. Ibid. p. 127. The forerunner of this paper is on p. 242, n. 7, "It is my conviction that the prohibition repeated in numerous instances throughout the Pentateuch, not to do any manner of 'work' on Sabbaths or festivals, whether the word *avodah* is used or *melakhah*, always signified one's occupation, the gainful employment in business, industry or profession, that one engaged in . . ."

His cosmic activity on the Sabbath (Gen. 2:2), it does not insist that the Sabbath must be a day of "rest," that it must be a quiescent day on which the person engages in no expenditure of kinetic energy.¹¹ Later Judaism also recognizes that God is *hamehadash betuho bekhol yom*, that He renews creation each day, including the Sabbath.¹² The quiescence of God reflected in Gen. 2:2f (*vayishbot, kee bo shabat*), refers specifically to the initial creation of the universe but does not deny that He continues to maintain it. It might be difficult to draw an analogy between this and the human condition, but I believe it is not entirely improper to attempt it. The human being should be seen as working at his gainful occupation all week and be encouraged to cease from it on the Sabbath. But he must be allowed to continue a process of renewal and refreshment of intellect and body on the Sabbath. This human renewal can come from a mix of contemplation, study and recreation, all of which might compromise traditionalist restrictions.

The Sabbath surely implies a time of spiritual renewal, but not withdrawal. Listening to, and playing, music is a significant form of spiritual renewal. Writing one's religious thoughts or taking notes on one's serious theological and halakhic studies is a form of spiritual and intellectual renewal. For the modern scholar to have sufficient time to write articles and books for publication, it is almost imperative that he utilize the Sabbath for this purpose. Visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, visiting parents and children and, thereby, cementing family love and concern, are all considerable forms of spiritual self-renewal or contributions to the spiritual renewal of others, and should be encouraged and engaged in even if local or long distance travel and telephoning are required.

The line between sacred and profane admittedly becomes rather fuzzy when we think of human love and concern. No Sabbath restrictions should stand in the way of the honest expression of human and familial love, or in the way of our quest to learn and to feel more about God in our writing, our music, or our art, and in work with the beauty of God's creation. The basic task before us in any effort to recapture and revitalize a meaningful Sabbath in our lives is to evaluate the meaning of *melakhah*, and seek to understand what it means that *melakhah* is prohibited, and how to relate our finds to contemporary synagogue and individual needs.¹³ It is clear from the fact that the rabbis termed the proliferating restrictions *shebut*, that they were conscious of creating their own non-torahitic Sabbath halakhah. Among these additions were the categories of buying and

11. See below for the impact of the concept of a quiescent Sabbath on the halakhah.

12. This theological formulation of daily recreation is found in the *shahrit* worship of any standard prayerbook. See e.g., *The Weekday Prayerbook*, ed. Jules Harlow (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 1961), p. 42.

13. The scope of this paper does not allow for a technical discussion of *melakhah* and that will have to remain for a separate article.

selling, the transaction of loans, and judicial proceedings.¹⁴ The prohibition of commerce is reflected centuries earlier (Neh. 10:31; 13:15–22), and is therefore to be seen as a necessary supplement to the Torah's prohibition of agricultural occupations in an age when domestic and international trade was vastly expanded.

Melakhah is to be seen neither as strenuous physical exertion nor as physical tasks unrelated to the making of a living or the accumulation of property. One need not see in the various biblical references an obligation placed upon the individual to desist from all routine private acts such as gardening, playing musical instruments, writing, and traveling for a *mizvah* or recreation.

The suggestion being made here is to limit prohibition of *melakhah* on the Sabbath to one's gainful occupation, whether it be of the strenuous physical type involving agriculture and loading and transporting, or business transactions which involve only conversation. The important ramification of this is that we must take a renewed look at the whole area of *shebut*, *tiltul*, *mukzah*, *tehum*, *erubin* (rabbinic requirements to desist from certain activities: carrying; separation from utensils, objects, etc.; Sabbath boundaries and the fusion of areas to circumvent *tehum*), and declare them inoperative. Thus, a prohibition like not trimming vegetables (B. *Shab.* 114b) would have no meaning in one's private life in one's personal kitchen when preparing Sabbath meals. Similarly, the whole gamut of restrictions unrelated to making one's living would simply be abrogated as either too onerous, or for purposes of intellectual honesty.¹⁵ On the other hand, while it would be wrong to sell stock on the telephone, as it would be to engage in the construction of a skyscraper for profit or wages, it would not be wrong to telephone one's parents in a distant place on the Sabbath in order to unite the heart of parents and children (Mal. 3:24).

Looking at the Sabbath in this way must lead to further implications. For example, even if it is wrong to buy stock on the telephone, it should not be wrong to purchase a meal on vacation. It is not the use of the telephone which is proscribed, but the making of profit. It is not "buying and selling" (*mekah umemkar*) under all circumstances which should be prohibited, but the engagement in gainful commerce. Thus, for example, the reference in Jer. 17:21f., forbidding *masa* "a burden," or "transporting," has no relationship to what has developed into the massive details composing *tiltul* halakhah as it is conceived by contemporary Jews who style themselves "orthodox." It is apparent from the context, and in the light of Neh. 13:15–22, that this relates to public commerce. Once we

14. *Sifra*, ed. Weiss, 83a. Cf. Philo, *Mig. Abr.* 16 (91).

15. Examples: not to pick one's teeth, comb the hair, apply cosmetics (M. *Shab.* 10:6), take honey out of a honeycomb, sweep one's house (B. *Shab.* 95a). Cf. M. *R.H.* 4:8; *Er.* 10:3; *Pes.* 6:1, and numerous other sources which list countless detailed prohibitions which would hardly spoil one's Sabbath if one ignored them, but lead to onerous tedium if one would be careful about these infinite restrictions, as well as cause a high degree of intellectual dishonesty when we continue to give them lip-service, but ignore them in practice.

realize this, we would not apply it to private carrying of items on one's person or even to such ritual items as the *shofar* and *lulab*. And in the case of the latter, we would allow the use of these objects on the Sabbath.¹⁶

Similarly, one may even question the legitimacy of the prohibition on cooking on the Sabbath, considering the possibility that the mana episode (Ex. 16:22–30), contains no actual prohibition spoken for the generations, or in a general futuristic manner. The time has come for the contemporary rabbinate to act as did the rabbis at Tiberius long ago.¹⁷ In a lengthy discussion on the use of hot water and hot springs on the Sabbath, we are told of the various restrictions on bathing and steam-bath sweating that were interdicted. But the public ignored the restrictions, and *rau sheen hadabar 'omed lahen*, when the rabbis saw that the halakhot were being ignored because “the matter did not stand well with them (the people),” they permitted the use of the hot springs of Tiberius on the Sabbath.¹⁸ This is a late second century matter and was done contrary to the halakhah already transmitted and still found in the Mishnah (*Shab.* 3:4).

In our own time, we might fruitfully apply a similar principle, “the matter no longer stands well with the public,” to a host of halakhot. For example, riding or traveling for a mizvah, even if only the mizvah of self-renewal in leisure and changing one's ambience, such as driving to the lake or sea shore, should not be construed as “sin.” Indeed, at one time travel seems to have been quite natural (*II Ki.* 4:22f). So, too, purchasing a meal during vacation, paying admissions to theatres, museums or concerts; writing unrelated to business, commerce or monetary gain; taking religious school children on trips; photography; the use of instrumental music even outside of the worship setting; recreational gardening; and shaving, should all not be construed as “sin.” Each of these activities may suggest many other examples. Each question should be dealt with on its own merit by the contemporary rabbinate, which possesses no less authority than did the ancient rabbis.¹⁹ The ancient authority that was

16. Num. 4:3, in reference to the levites doing their assigned tasks in the sanctuary, *melakhah* takes on the meaning of one's regularly prescribed occupation. See its parallel, Num. 4:23 where *la'asot melakhah* = *la'abod abodah*, referring to one's regular occupation. And just as priests and levites were free to work on the Sabbath, so were their successors, the ancient rabbis. As to the carrying of ritual objects on the Sabbath, a clear decision of our Law Committee permitting the *shofar* and *lulab* and *etrog* rituals on the Sabbath is long overdue. The refusal of some *mohalim* (circumcisors) to circumcise children when the eighth day falls on the Sabbath, contrary to the Torah, is a spiritual scandal which calls for condemnation.

17. B. *Shab.* 39b-40a.

18. The discussion is traced to Bar Kappara (2nd-3rd centuries), who, after being a disciple of R. Judah haNasi, conducted his own school at Caesara, Parud or Lydda, the precise location being a matter of dispute.

19. On the matter of “authority,” see Phillip Sigal, *New Dimensions*, pp. 32-34, 95f; 173-175, 247, n. 13. See also the index entries, “Authority,” “Contemporary Authority,” in *New Dimensions* and in *Emergence I* and *II*; see *Emergence I*, Pt. 1, pp. 110f., 480, n. 95; Pt. 2, pp. 19, 258f.; Vol. II, 247-251. My view of *shebut* takes into full consideration the comprehensive essay by Boaz Cohen, “Sabbath Prohibitions Known as Shebut,” *Law and Tradition in Judaism*, (New York: 1959).

applied to the proliferation of restrictions was also applied at that time to the introduction of permissive alleviations. The present age calls for this desperately, for this age, more than ever in history, is *‘et la‘asot la’adonay*, a time to do for the Lord, for *heferu toratekhah*, the Torah is repeatedly violated (B. *Ber.* 54a, 63a).

Not only can we infer nothing beyond the prohibition of gainful occupation from the Torah, but an analysis of the Mishnah's thirty-nine *‘abot* clearly indicates they were similarly related to one's gainful labor at agriculture, textile manufacturing, the arrangement of the food supply, the tanning industry, construction, and the use of fire or writing in the execution of any of these. Similarly, when we permit both electricity and photography for every purpose that enhances the Sabbath, we will nevertheless continue to prohibit the mere pushing of a button of a copying machine to reproduce materials unrelated to the spiritual enjoyment of the Sabbath. It is not the use of the machine which is interdicted, but the purpose for which it is used. Rabbinic examples of prohibited activities (B. *Shab.* 74b, 75b), bear this out: treating a tent peg in a stove, boiling pitch, chiseling stone and blowing glassware. There are no examples that are relevant to the modern milieu that affect our lifestyle and our spiritual and physical enjoyment of the Sabbath: cutting flowers for the Sabbath table; taking a vitamin pill out of a bottle, involving no pounding of medicines, and the like. Furthermore, when merely talking about business and hiring workmen are prohibited, it is apparent that the prohibition of *melakhah* had nothing to do with physical exertion but with gainful commerce (M. *Shab.* 23:3; B. *Shab.* 150a). On the other hand, for the honor of the dead, one may ignore the Sabbath, and engage in a great number of activities (M. *Shab.* 23:5), as one may also in the interests of enjoying the Sabbath or performing a *mizvah* on it (M. *Shab.* 24:5).

A very careful scrutiny of the Mishnah, Tosefta, midrashim, the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds indicates a high degree of contradiction among the rabbis, and sometimes a level of piety that is irrelevant to any circles outside of those that were *perushim* in the early centuries of the common era. The material reflects polemic with both *perushim* and Christian Jews that sometimes alleviated stringency and, sometimes, contrarily, proliferated it. But of greatest interest to us is the assortment of hermeneutical principles with which they operated that can offer us a tremendous resource for radical change in order to save the Sabbath as a viable and enjoyable institution in Judaism.

III. *A Hermeneutic For Tomorrow*

The ancient rabbis operated with a variety of principles that alleviated some of the stringencies of Sabbath halakhah.²⁰ And, conscious of

20. For example, *Melakhah she‘enah zerikhah legufah*, a task which in itself is not the objective: B. *Shab.* 73b; Bez: 8a; Hag. 10a; or *melekhet mahshebet ‘asrah Torah*, the Torah prohibited only activities conducted with intent: B. *Hag.* 10b; Bez. 13b.

the heavy burden of multiple restrictions, they enunciated an array of *mizvot* that supercede the Sabbath.²¹ The primary general principle was that *pikuaḥ nefesh* (the saving of life) was cause to waive the Sabbath requirements. This was also so even if it was uncertain that there is a direct danger to life.²² An expository rationale under which all such alleviating hermeneutical devices were subsumed was articulated by R. Simon b. Menassia, "The Sabbath is handed over to you and not you to the Sabbath."²³

That there is more than one direction to Sabbath joy is seen in the rabbinic rejection of pietistic antagonism to sex on the Sabbath.²⁴ Sexual relations were later urged by the halakhah and emphasized by pietistic kabbalists and ḥasidim as a regular Friday night activity. The humor of the serious discussion whether the first intercourse of married life when the hymen is penetrated is permitted on the Sabbath should not be overlooked. The Talmud reflects that it was discussed at length at both Sura and Nehardea, and that scholars at both academies took the lenient view and allowed it. Later authorities continued to debate the matter and we are told that R. Yohanan (3rd cent.) forbade the first intercourse to take place on the Sabbath, but that, nevertheless, the halakhah is that it may. Some of our sages were so perceptive of a new dimension in Sabbath joy that they urged sexual relations every Friday night as well as Sabbath afternoon.²⁵

Since the Sabbath today is the only day when some people attend public worship, the notion that supplicatory and petitional prayers should not be part of the liturgy ought to be reconsidered, and the liturgy radically recast. A new hermeneutic of Sabbath prayer would not be unprecedented. For example, the beautiful prayer from the Zohar, *berikh shemai* is partially supplicatory, and careful examination of various segments of the liturgy and Grace after meals will yield a variety of examples of petitionary prayer.²⁶

21. B. *Shab.* 123b; T. *Shab.* 15:1. Examples are given at T. *Shab.* 15:16; M. *Shab.* 19:2f.; *Pes.* 6:1f; *Er.* 10:13; *Shebiit* 1:4; B. *M.K.* 3b-4a; *Makot* 8b; *Men.* 72a; *R.H.* 9a; *Shab.* 132b; M. *Men.* 10:1,3,9; *Num. R.* 16:1.

22. *Mekh.* III, 197f.; M. *Yom* 8:6; T. *Shab.* 15:11,15,16; B. *Shab.* 57a.

23. *Mekh* III, 198f. Cf. B. *Yom.* 85b, using Lev. 18:5 "and you shall live by them" (the *mizvot*), to condone Sabbath violation. We have come to understand "live" in more than one dimension, interpreting it beyond physical survival to include a perspective of a higher cultural experience.

24. *Jub.* 50:8; *Ket.* 5b-7a, 62b, 65b.

25. B. *Nid.* 38a; *Ket.* 62b; later halakhah was bolstered by the mystical attitude expressed in the Zohar, *Kedoshim* 81-a-b, (*Zohar*, trans. Maurice Simon and Harry Sperling, 5 vols. [New York: n.d.] V, 93f.; cf. R. Asher to *Ket.* 62b, at 5:29, and Alfasi on the text; *Shulḥan Arukh Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 280:1, "sexual relations are one of the Sabbath joys . . .")

26. Early pietism already reflected in II Macc. 8:29 opposed supplication on the Sabbath, and this opposition entered rabbinic Judaism. The Zohar prayer is part of the service for taking out the Torah and is found in any standard Sabbath prayerbook. The negative halakhic posture concerning petitionary prayer on the Sabbath is based upon aggadic midrash, *Tanḥuma to Vayera* I (Warsaw: 1910), p. 23b. See also P. *Shab.* 15b; Lev. *R.* 34:16.

A re-examination of *sheḥut* would also lead to reconsidering recreational physical activity such as swimming, tennis, jogging, bicycling and golf, to mention only a few current sports, as part of the very purpose for cessation from *melakhah*, one's occupation. Once before in history, during hellenistic times, "physical refreshment" was seen to be a purpose of the Sabbath. For Philo this might have signified giving the body total rest, but for us the relationship between exercise and health would lead to a permissive view. Philo, like the pietists of Qumran, viewed the Sabbath as a quiescent day, while for us leisure and exercise have other connotations. Nevertheless, we would continue to prohibit organized and competitive sports while, for exercise and fun, we would affirm the old decision in Renaissance Italy which found that playing tennis was halakhically warranted.²⁷

A contemporary hermeneutic must satisfy the spirit of the rabbinic teaching that, when "the hour requires it," rabbis may decide even contrary to the Torah.²⁸ The times require that we liberate ourselves from obsolete criteria and petty minutiae no longer attractive to the overwhelming number of Jews, even if lately a small but vocal minority of young people appear to be finding a religious haven in ultra-orthodox patterns. We are called upon to reflect more profoundly upon the spiritual benefit that can accrue from reorganizing the needs arising from contemporary perceptions of leisure, travel, recreation, social patterns, and the realities of technology. In this regard, we should not allow "a mountain resting on a hair" to obstruct us.

A contemporary hermeneutic, like that of the ancients, would address itself to matters relevant currently. For example, in ancient times, fasting was not permitted on the Sabbath, yet some rabbis moderated that prohibition to counter the adverse portents of a dream.²⁹ In our time, we would address the problems that exercise us, but similarly indulge ourselves the luxury of discovering *heterim* (permissive decisions) where previously *issurim* (prohibitions) abounded. While rabbinic *sheḥut* multiplied restrictions, our thrust should be to redefine *menuḥah* (rest) with a view to transforming *sheḥut* from its negative to a positive connotation.³⁰ In essence, *sheḥut* implied that the action was not prohibited by the Torah, but the rabbis prohibited it for the *mizvah* of "resting."³¹ But dancing, for example, is a *sheḥut* (M. Bez. 5:2), and yet dancing has been allowed, first

27. Philo, *Special Laws* II, 15 (60); Sigal, *New Dimensions*, p. 120, 130f.

28. B. Yeb. 90b; 122b; San. 46a. See the interesting discussion by Maharsha (R. Samuel Edels) at the end of *Yeḥamot*, where it is clear that he was troubled by rabbinic power to abrogate halakhah of the Torah, but concedes it to be so.

29. B. Er. 41a; P. Taan. 67a; implied at M. Ned. 9:6; B. R.H. 19a; Taan. 17b; P. Ned. 40d; B. Pes. 68b; Shab. 11a; Taan. 12b; Gen. R. 44:12.

30. *Sifra*, ed. Weiss, 83b, 101a. Cohen, *Law and Tradition*, p. 137, points to the various enumerations of *sheḥut* (18 in *Sifra*, 14 at M. Bez. 5:2, and 10 in *Mekh. de R. Shimon*), all prohibitions, with many constantly added to the roster.

31. See e.g. *Lekah Tob* to Lev. 23:3, cited by Cohen, *Op. cit.*, p. 156.

on Simḥat Torah, and later on any Sabbath and festival.³² Such precedents in the halakhah point to our right to reconsider many a *shebut* in the light of contemporary technology and perspectives. Either the old hermeneutic can be applied to new situations, or new hermeneutical principles can be designed. Although Philo favored a quiescent Sabbath in some of his writings, as noted previously, he also appears to reflect a hellenistic diaspora view that at the core of Sabbath halakhah was the problem of gainful occupation when he wrote that Moses “determined . . . abstaining from work and *profit-making* crafts, and professions and business pursued *to get a livelihood*” (my italics).³³

V. Conclusion

The Sabbath, as we have inherited it in the twentieth century, is basically the product of gestation between 450 B.C.E. and 500 C.E. Pietism, from the time of Ezra through the talmudic period and on into the later middle ages, quantified the prohibitions, although, out of fairness, it must be said that this pietism also quantified positive observances in order to expand *‘Oneg shabbat* (Sabbath joy). There can be no doubt, although space prohibits that it be shown here, that polemical struggles with Christianity and Karaism had a powerful impact upon the multiplication of halakhot connected with the Sabbath. While at times this struggle led to the introduction of more ritual, it also had the function of advocating greater withdrawal and quiescence leading to stringent restrictions. The Ezraic-Nehemian era introduced a “closed-society” tendency in Judaism. Hellenistic Judaism threw out the challenge of an “open-society,” but the separatistic closed Judaic society remained predominant because of the serious challenges of Christianity and Karaism. Separatism nourished pietism and ritualism and, above all, did so in reference to the Sabbath, considered a sign of the covenant and indispensable to the survival of Judaism.

By the middle of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this institution, which rested “as a mountain on a hair,” consisted of a veritable mountain range of massively detailed Sabbath restrictions. The Sabbath halakhah was virtually no longer viable for the newly emerging Jew of Western European and, later, North American society, affected by the industrial and scientific revolutions, political emancipation and his subsequent acculturation and integration into his society. Under the impact of researches by modern Judaic scholarship even from before the time of the *Verein für Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the traditional mystique about the corpus of rabbinic literature was undermined by historicism, and the

32. Cohen, *Op. cit.*, p. 160, cites dancing as originally permitted by Hai Gaon for Simḥat Torah during the tenth century.

33. *Moses* II, 39 (211). See also *On Creation* 43 (128).

absolute equal legitimacy of all halakhah collapsed. Historicism and new scientific methodology in textual study led to an enlightened concept of halakhic growth, diversity and flexibility of options which became the basic operating theory of what we call the Conservative Movement.

But in redefining *melakhah* as one's gainful occupation, we should not be guilty of a new absolutism. As a rabbi, I engage in my gainful occupation on the Sabbath, and I can see no reason why others devoted to the physical and spiritual well-being of people should not have the same right. This might apply to all who serve the public in the field of health sciences and in the fine arts (a symphony conductor, for example), among others. The matter is very complex, but somehow we must undertake the gigantic task of delineating and validating a meaningful contemporary Sabbath halakhah. Intellectual honesty, religious credibility and spiritual integrity demands this of us.

We must continue to see the Sabbath as a perpetual sign of the covenant. Even more, we must pick up upon the growing interest in theological language and teach the Sabbath as a sacrament, as George Foote Moore once phrased it, following the usage of the term according to Augustine, "a sacred sign by which a religious community is bound together . . ."³⁴ But as far as the halakhah is concerned, the consistent development of prohibitions from the simple interdiction of agricultural labor to the complex halakhah of later talmudic times only teaches us that this was the way the ancient sages thought it best to assure the individual's consciousness of the covenantal holiness of the day. The halakhah remained relatively static through the middle ages. The closely catalogued collection of Sabbath halakhot in Joseph Karo's *Shulhan Arukh (Orah Hayyim 242-416)* covers every facet of life.³⁵ It was this sixteenth century Karoic halakhah that the nineteenth and twentieth-century immigrant brought with him from Eastern Europe to North America. It was this same halakhic complex that the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reformers abandoned, and that the twentieth-century conservative rabbis and synagogues had to confront, and are still compelled to confront.

The central fact of our time is that very few people define leisure or bodily and mental refreshment in sixteenth-century terms. If we perceive of the Sabbath as a day of leisure, we think of it as a day at our disposal, not a day on which to be confined and constrained. It is equally true that we must think of it as a holy day, as sacred time, *lekadesh*, "by hallowing it." This means we must teach the sacred dimension of the Sabbath as an opportunity to enrich the personal, family and communal celebration of sacred moments. Toward this end, we should continue the positive commemorative rituals such as candle-lighting, kiddush, family dinner and gatherings on Friday night. But even more important is that we should devise a Sabbath morning liturgy that would be radically different from

34. George Foote Moore, *Judaism*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: 1950), II, p. 24.

35. For a capsule review of this halakhah see Sigal, *Emergence* II, 335-339.

the traditional one. The new liturgy would eliminate redundancy and its wording would emphasize the cosmic, universal values that flow from our recognition of the Sabbath as the sacred embodiment of divine creation and redemption. Our obligation to beauty, to music and art, to the ecology, and to the human person would all be highlighted. This would make of Sabbath liturgy a source and means to renew our dedication to universal human love and peace, the ultimate of God's redemptive plan. The synagogue should become the scene of new rituals for sanctifying time by celebrating life. The synagogue on the Sabbath should increasingly become the scene of personal thanks and humility in the face of life, and gratitude for the continuous transformation that we experience from one stage of life to another.³⁶ Perhaps we should be so radical as to introduce Sabbath weddings. The symbolism of joining the bride and groom in holy union toward the close of the Sabbath can be rather potent. Marriage can then be seen for what it truly is, an event in which God's cosmic role as creator and redeemer, and the human role as partner in God's unfolding Kingdom, are both highlighted.

In these and other creative ways liturgical renewal will add a dimension to the consciousness of the day's sanctity. Liturgical renewal, however, will have to be comprehensive, for the present worship order, including many of the Torah and haftarah readings, is of little consequence or spiritualizing effect for the contemporary generation. The old theology of prayer centered in Creation, Revelation, and Redemption-Resurrection with its *amidah* structure should be retained, but the prayers reconstituted. The old pentateuchal — haftarah cycles have to be abandoned and neither the annual nor triennial cycle retained.³⁷

Halakhic renewal will have to accompany liturgical renewal. The two should proceed in tandem. Halakhic renewal will have to focus on designing a permissive day in which the quest for *menuḥah* (restfulness) will provide spiritual regeneration as well as emotional and physical gratification in accordance with current perspectives. The enjoyment of such physical and mental refreshment and recreation should not engender a guilt-complex but give the committed Jew a sense of elevation rather than depression.

36. Space does not permit a more detailed treatment of liturgical development.

37. The consequences for Simḥat Torah would have to be discussed in a separate paper.

Shabbat – A Key to Spiritual Renewal in Israel

PINCHAS PELI

Three Pictures

Picture Number One: It is Shabbat morning. We see a street in a fashionable section in Jerusalem (or, for that matter, in Tel Aviv or Natanya or Beer Sheva). It is unusually quiet. Shops are closed, a lonely car cruises by timidly in silence. Older, younger people, tallit-bags under their arms, walk in different directions, but to the same destination: the Synagogue. There are a variety of synagogues in the neighborhood, large and small, Sepharadi and Ashkenazi, representing all styles, customs and backgrounds. Many children, heads covered with white hand-crocheted kippot, on their way to Synagogue, too. Shabbat holiness fills the air. Stretch out your hand and you can touch it.

Picture Number Two: Same day, Herzliyah Beach (or, for that matter, Bat Yam Beach, or Ashkelon or the public parks in the north or the south of the country). Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of vehicles of all makes and types, coming and going. It is the day of the cafe houses, restaurants, ice-cream and popcorn vendors. Also of the emergency rooms in the hospitals whose weekly reports keep up Israel's grim record as a world champion in traffic accidents. The noise and chatter, coming mainly from countless transistor radios, will not subside until late in the afternoon.

Picture Number Three: Same day, an orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem (or, in Bnei Brak, Petah Tikvah or elsewhere). Hundreds of men in black garb and fur hats, notwithstanding the hot summer climate, waiting for every passing car on the nearby road to greet it with shouts of "Shabbes, Shabbes!" Very often the shouts warm up into stone throwing, rioting, police interference, name calling (one of the favorites: "NAZI"), mutual accusations of violence and cruelty between police, non-observant and orthodox. Of course, all of these are Jews and would no doubt protest vehemently if anyone dared to exclude them from the "children of Israel" referred to in the verse "and the children of Israel shall keep the Shabbat to observe the Shabbat throughout their generations, for a perpetual Covenant." To be sure, all of them see themselves within the ancient Covenant.

The above three pictures give but few of the many varied faces of the Shabbat in present day Israel. There is one thing, though, that they ALL

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have in common (from the Shabbat at the Hasidic Court to the one in the leftist secular kibbutz) and that is, the Jewish Shabbat is an integral part of life in this country; it is an existential reality that one can neither forget, ignore nor escape. It was, I believe, the late Rav Kook who said that while *Hutz L'arez* (the Diaspora) is marked by the fact that there are *Shomrei Shabbat* (Shabbat observers) there, the land of Israel, on the other hand, is distinguished by the fact of having *M'halelei Shabbat* (Shabbat desecrators). When his interlocutor looked up with surprise at the saintly Rabbi who was a great lover of Zion, hardly to be suspected of slandering the land, the Rabbi explained that both places, the Diaspora and Eretz Israel, are distinguished by the *exception* to the prevalent rule: When one looks at the Diaspora, one notices the Shabbat observers here and there because, except for them, there is no presence of Shabbat. The reverse is true in the Land of Israel.

Shabbat and Tension

It is a fact that Shabbat is central in every aspect of life — legal, economic, social, religious, cultural and political — in Israel. Even one who desecrates the Shabbat does, in many other ways, mark and observe it. This is perhaps the source of the tension, which is sometimes destructive but, more often, creative, and which marks Shabbat in Israel. This tension is not limited to the legal-political aspect, as part of the ongoing clash between state and religion in contemporary Israel, nor did it start with the legislation or implementation of these or other Shabbat laws. Its roots strike much deeper and permeate the very core of the social-cultural make-up of Israel reborn, since the earliest days of the modern Return to Zion in recent generations.

The dilemma of being “torn away” or drifting away from the Shabbat, by social, cultural or economic forces, that exists for Jews in the western countries of the Diaspora is significant only to a very limited measure (if at all) for the Jew in Israel. He is not faced with Sunday or any other day as a rival or substitute for his Shabbat.

On the other hand, the Israeli is faced with a new, unprecedented situation where he must bear full responsibility for “making” or shaping his Shabbat all on his own. The traditional framework of the *shtetel*, *mellah*, and family have broken down; a new ethnic religious community (as has emerged in the United States, for instance) has not yet arisen in Israel (with a possible exception of the *datti kibbutz*) since the Jew in Israel has felt no pressing need for separate ethnic group identification and there has been no suitable religious leadership that knows how to offer him traditional religious values in new vessels. In public life, the Israeli Jew must face the challenge of the Shabbat while assuming the responsibility of running a modern state and army without relying on the individual *Shabbat goi* or on the majority gentile population. No less challenging is the

solitary responsibility facing the Israeli in his personal attempts to come to terms with whatever can be salvaged from the Shabbat which was abandoned in an act of anti-religious protest and later was destroyed in his parental home.

To these difficulties one has to add the fact that “religion,” which includes, of course, the Shabbat, is governed in Israeli public life by political power structures and through legislation which appear (justly or unjustly) in the eyes of many Israelis as attempts of monopolistic coercion tactics by vested interest orthodox groups which one “has” to fight off. The Shabbat thus often becomes the victim of the feuding “secular” and “religious” camps, with many people wondering whether the gains acquired by Shabbat legislation are not offset by the loss of appreciation for the lofty world which the Shabbat represents and which could so enrich Israel’s spirit.

Remember, Observe, Do

Against this background of inner tension, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a process of general alienation of the Israeli from traditional forms as well as from revolutionary values associated with the earlier generation of the “Founding Fathers” of Israeli society — one can distinguish certain interesting developments which are presently at work in the shaping of the Shabbat.

I should like to group these developments along the lines of the three-faceted understanding of the Shabbat as I read them in Scripture and as they are represented in much of the intricate Shabbat symbolism. These are:

- 1) *Zakhor* Remember the Shabbat Day, as in Exodus 20:8.
- 2) *Shamor* Observe, or keep, the Shabbat Day, as in Deuteronomy 5:12.
- 3) *La‘asot* to make the Shabbat, as in Deuteronomy 31:16 (compare Genesis 2:3).

Zakhor — Remember, denotes the spirit of the Shabbat, the so-called Aggadah, or poetry, which is Shabbat; the memory and the expectation; the song and the beauty, the delight of the soul, Shabbat the *Kallah*, the lovely bride.

Shamor — Observe, denotes the body of the day, the Law which gives substance to the Love; the “do’s” and the “don’t’s”. *Shabbat* the *Malkhah*, the commanding queen.

La‘asot — To do, denotes the human effort to join his own creative spark to that of God’s Shabbat in order that out of this union will come forth the best of divinely inspired human spiritual creativeness.

Observing the contemporary Israeli scene of Shabbat, one would find, with all the drab problematic tension described above, much fascinating creative activity covering all three aspects of *Zakhor*, *Shamor* and

La'asot. There is much probing and on-going search among many sensitive Israelis to rediscover the eternal light of the Shabbat, not only as a nostalgic relic of the past, but as a fresh source of spiritual nourishment in the present and the future. These do not lie in the realm of the ethereal or the theoretical, as they might have done outside the Land. In Erez Israel, Jewish thought must eventually be translated into concrete reality. It inevitably leads from *Zakhor* to *Shamor* via the path of *La'asot*.

The manifold creative efforts in Israel of the various kibbutz movements *to do* the Shabbat, the attempts to shape new permanent molds of *Shamor*, of Shabbat ritual which are *not* a passive continuation of the past, are a case in point.

Recently, Arye Ben Gurion, of kibbutz Beth Hashitah in the Valley of Jezreel, who founded and manages the Inter-Kibbutz Festival Archives, collected and published scores of *Kabbalat Shabbat* programs in kibbutzim throughout the country. Together with these he published a programmatic anthology dealing with the question of what Shabbat can, and should, mean to the spiritual, cultural and social life of non-religious Jews who are dedicated to the building of free, consciously functioning and conscientious Jewish communities.

The common underlying features of this fascinating collection of experimental Shabbat ceremonies in so many non-religious kibbutzim all over the country is that, in spite of the differences between them, one senses in all of them the awe and the joy of welcoming a day from the Jewish past. There is a yearning to appropriate the inner meaning of Jewish tradition, while not being bound to do so because of religious obedience; a desire to replicate the meeting of heaven and earth that Shabbat represents while realizing that the Jewish earth is now so much different from what it was to their fathers and that as the earth now is *real* so must heaven be real. This calls for an intense searching in the ancient sources to discover the secret of the "Good Life" as understood by Jewish tradition, which stands for the oneness of God and His creation, the brotherhood of mankind and the meaningfulness of life in spite of its seeming absurdity.

There are many ways in which the kibbutzim try to "receive" the Shabbat, not just as an idea, but as a day which is both a "gift from heaven" and a living reality.

What meaning is there today for the age-hallowed lighting of candles as a way of ushering in the Shabbat? Is it but an outdated religious superstitious act? Would colorful flowers or the melodious playing of flutes be more meaningful as a way of "receiving" the Shabbat? Should Shabbat be received in the common dining room or in the privacy of the family? Should the children be part of the ceremony or should they be the sole active participants in it? And what about the liturgy? Should the old prayers — which are so poetically rich — be used and to what extent? How much and what kind of new liturgy should be included?

Every kibbutz tries to answer those and other questions in its own way. What is common, however, to almost all of the exemplary programs collected by Ben Gurion is that they all strive towards some kind of stability, permanence, “institutionalized spontaneity,” what one would call, in the language of Jewish liturgy a *nusah*, a permanent form.

Thus the traditional heavenly Shabbat is groping to find itself a new “earth” in Modern Israel.

This creative approach to the Shabbat is accompanied by serious attempts at a re-interpretation of the tradition. The “new” does not want to be, or to appear, as utterly new; it desires to find roots in the past, and thus what is taking place in this area in Israel surpasses its own boundaries and may have an enriching effect on the understanding of Judaism as a whole. Take, for instance, the interpretation of the Shabbat traditions suggested by the Israeli pioneering botanist, Noga Hareuveni, and how he brings together the heaven of Shabbat and the earth of Israel. The bounty of the earth as promised to the observers of the commandments of the Lord in Deuteronomy 11:14 is as follows: “I will give the rain of your land in its season . . . that thou mayest gather in thy *corn*, and thy *wine* and thine *oil*.”

This earthly bounty was celebrated every Shabbat with the special Shabbat offering in the Temple, that included fine flour mingled with oil and wine (see Numbers 28:9), as it is still celebrated every Shabbat in the Jewish home (transformed on Shabbat into a sanctuary) with the blessing over the lighting of candles (oil), the Kiddush (wine) and the Challah (bread of fine flour). How movingly beautiful the Shabbat in Erez Israel can be, if these are brought forth with your own hands from your own olive tree, your own field and your own vineyard.

Shabbat of Togetherness

Another interesting creative attempt “to do” the Shabbat that must be mentioned is that of *Shabbat Yahad*, a unique educational and cultural enterprise which was started eight years ago as a combined project of a group of Israelis and a group in Canada (Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Montreal). The purpose of *Shabbat Yahad* was to utilize the day for a renewal of spiritual and ethical values in Israeli society as well as to bring together Jews from the Diaspora and Israel for mutual spiritual enrichment within a genuine, creative Shabbat experience.

The organizers of *Shabbat Yahad*, in summing up seven years of operation, saw it as a most successful “pilot project” which could spread and, eventually, become a popular pattern for the celebration of the Shabbat for many Israelis. *Shabbat Yahad* has, so far, attracted several hundred families representing all segments of Israeli society. While attempts to form communities in Israel on the basis of proximity of neighborhood have not yet been very successful because of the gap separating

religious from non-religious, Sepharadi from Ashkenazi, newcomers from veterans, leftwingers in political and social outlook from rightwingers — the Shabbat away from home and neighborhood, in a relaxed atmosphere, open for spiritual and personal growth in togetherness — has given rise to a new type of nationwide community, which meets many times in a year. Each Shabbat is dedicated to intensive study and open debate at the feet of great scholars (condition: no publicity) on some vital issue of Israeli life in the light of the classical sources of Judaism. *Shabbat Yahad* participants (those who so desire) pray together in a relaxed, congenial atmosphere of fellowship and partake in the traditional Shabbat delight of good food, animated song and often dance together, while enjoying the rare opportunity to speak their minds, to express ideas and dreams beyond what might be “expected” from each one according to his particular “labeled” status. If Shabbat means freedom, the best place to practice and experience it under the Israeli style of life is away from home, among a community of people who gather together to celebrate it. Some of the ideas guiding *Shabbat Yahad* may not be new to Americans who are familiar with retreat and community experiences; they are, however, new to Israelis.

The idea of Shabbat as a means of a creative togetherness is now being emulated by many groups in Israel after the pattern set by *Shabbat Yahad*. The fact that such a Shabbat has a counterpart group outside of Israel that functions according to similar lines and carries over some of the creative ideas developed at *Shabbat Yahad* in Israel opens new vistas for Diaspora/Israeli combined efforts towards renewal, for which Shabbat is both philosophically and practically a most important key.

A Woman's Prayer

“May the holy and beautiful influence of the Sabbath ever abide with us. May we rejoice in the beauty of its holiness and be worthy of Thy manifold blessings. Give us our needful sustenance and grant us health and strength to pursue evenly our daily work. Bless all our loved ones and inspire us with Thy Holy Spirit. As I kindle these Sabbath lights as signs of joy and devotion, so may Thy light be kindled within us — the light of reason and truth, the light of loving kindness and mercy, bringing joy, peace and blessing, Amen” (*Tehinah*).

The Sabbath in Israel: Law and Life

THEODORE FRIEDMAN

SABBATH OBSERVANCE IN ISRAEL IS A VARIATED reality shadowed over by a number of problems, large and small. We begin with a description of the reality that derives, insofar as its legal status is concerned, from a law enacted by the Knesset in 1951. The law is entitled "Hours of Work and Rest" and ordains that an employee must have thirty-six hours of continuous rest from weekly work. In the case of a Jew, this period must include the Sabbath. In the case of a non-Jew, the period may be either Sunday or Friday, whichever is accepted by him as a day of rest. Paragraph 9 of the law adds: "It is forbidden to employ someone on his day of rest." (We shall deal subsequently with the clause in the law which permits exceptions to the foregoing under certain conditions.) But the law is not the only legislative act which gives official recognition and status to the Sabbath.

The Law of Independence Day, for example, went through several modifications in order to provide that if the Fifth Day of Iyar (Israel Independence Day) should fall on either Friday, Saturday or Sunday, then its observance would take place on the previous Thursday. Similar legislation was enacted to avoid an opening session of a newly elected Knesset on the Sabbath or a Holyday. The same stipulations were included in fixing the legal date for Holocaust Day. On a personal level, one cannot be called up for reserve duty in the army on either the Sabbath or a Holyday.

It should be noted at once that the law forbids an employer to require a Jew to work on the Sabbath but is silent on the question of one who is self-employed or a member of a co-operative firm, as it is on the question of keeping places of business open on the Sabbath. The latter area was deliberately left to the jurisdiction of the various municipalities. Hence, local legislation on the subject varies widely from city to city. In Jerusalem, naturally, the Sabbath finds all stores, restaurants, cafes and places of amusement shut tight from sundown to sundown. While stores are closed in Tel Aviv, restaurants, cafes and a limited number of cinemas are open. In Haifa, on the other hand, stores are permitted to open for business.

The mention of Haifa brings us to the oft-quoted and much debated "status quo" in religious matters. That phrase occurs for the first time in the coalition agreement drawn up between Ben Gurion and the National Religious Party in November 1955. The relevant sentence reads: "In the laws of marriage and divorce and *public transportation* as well as all other religious matters, the present *status quo* will be preserved during the term

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of office of the present government." The reference is obviously to the anomalous fact that while there is no public transportation on Sabbath throughout the rest of Israel, buses do operate in Haifa. The latter arrangement goes back to the days of the British Mandatory Government. One notes, in this connection, that during the recent coalition negotiations (July 1981), Agudat Yisroel sought to extract a commitment from Prime Minister Begin to put an end to this anomaly. Immediately, a public clamor was raised by the City Fathers of Haifa who threatened to operate the Carmelit — the city subway line that runs between the upper and lower city — if the Prime Minister acceded to the demand, whereupon the demand was quietly dropped. But he did accept the Agudah's condition that within a "reasonable time" El Al would be ordered to put an end to flights on Sabbath. The latter operate from only a number of European cities on the continent and cater to an almost exclusively Gentile clientele. (If and when the order does go into effect, the move, by a conservative estimate, will cost El Al a twenty million dollar loss in revenue that it can ill afford.) Agudah's demand of no sailings on Sabbath by Israel's merchant fleet was likewise accepted by the Prime Minister. Incidentally, the present law does not apply to flights en route or to ships on the high seas.

In 1964, an effort by the National Religious Party to enact legislation designed to apply the law of 1951 to stores, restaurants, cinemas, self-employed people, and the like died in committee. Thus, for all practical purposes, it is still that law which gives official legal status to Shabbat in Israel. But, as already intimated above, that very law provides that special permits may be granted to certain employers enabling them to make work on Shabbat a condition of employment under any one of the following conditions: (1) if the factory is engaged in defense work; (2) if the work is essential to the well-being of the citizens of the country (electricity, water supply and telephone, for example, fall into this category); (3) if cessation of work on Shabbat would entail considerable loss to the country's economy as a whole; (4) if the industrial process carried on by a factory is continuous and can not be interrupted; (5) if what is involved is an enterprise whose services are essential to the country.

Such permits, valid for two years and renewable thereafter, are issued by the Minister of Labor. A permanent permit requires the approval of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Religions, in addition to that of the Minister of Labor. In issuing permits, the latter is guided by a committee of three, consisting of the Supervisor of the Ministry of Labor, the Secretary of the government and a private citizen who happens to be an observant scientist, serves as professor of physics at the Hebrew University and heads the Jerusalem College of Technology. Until some years ago, such permits were issued almost virtually on request, but recently a committee was appointed to study the entire situation. Following their recommendations, the procedure was tightened and the advisory committee referred to above was appointed. As a result, during the past four

years, the number of such "work on Shabbat" permits has been reduced by almost 20%. In order to qualify, a factory owner must give evidence that his plant is in operation on Saturday night. The denial of such a permit to a factory, has been known to arouse its workers to very vocal opposition, since work on Shabbat carries a very high overtime rate that can range anywhere from 150% to a 400% increase over the normal hourly wage scale. In many instances, such an increase can represent the bulk of a worker's pay. When the announcement was made that the government would, in due time, order El Al to discontinue its Shabbat operations, the workers involved declared that they would strike when, and if, such an order were to be given.

According to a noted local observant scientist, there are few industrial processes which must necessarily run continuously, that is, provided the production system is initially set up with a view to maintaining a five-day or six-day work week. (Bacteriological processes involved in the manufacture of pharmaceuticals would be an exception to the above observation.) In recent years, an Institute of Science and Halakhah has been established, whose purpose it is to design automated processes that would not require the employment of labor on Shabbat.

The foregoing are the dry and perhaps tedious facts of the legal status of the Sabbath in Israel. They hardly begin to convey either the full living reality or the problematics involved in maintaining Shabbat in a Jewish state. In this regard, this writer can speak out of personal observation only about Jerusalem. What Shabbat is actually like, say, in a town like Bnei Beraq, the preponderant majority of whose inhabitants are extremely Orthodox, he can only imagine. Haifa, by way of contrast, would stand at the other end of the scale of Shabbat observance. The same spectrum applies to the Kibbuzim. (The writer has had occasion to spend Shabbat in both Orthodox and secular Kibbuzim.) In the former, the traditional mode of Shabbat observance is, of course, punctiliously observed. To be sure, there are problems of maintaining certain aspects of the economy of the Kibbuz that occasionally present problems as far as the Shabbat halakhah is concerned, but, thanks to automation, these have largely been solved. In the secular Kibbuzim, most members are usually at leisure on Shabbat. In the communal dining hall, Shabbat is visible in the form of flowers and a white tablecloth. Generally, Friday evening is reserved for a Kibbuz meeting or some cultural event.

But to return to Jerusalem. Late on Friday afternoon there is a perceptible decrease in the number of vehicles on the road. About a half hour before candle-lighting time, public transportation, except for tourist buses, comes to a halt. In such Orthodox neighborhoods as Meah Shearim, Sanhedriyah and Givat Mordechai, one can observe men on their way to or from the local *mikveh*. In these quarters, barriers are put in the streets (with official permission), placing these areas out of bounds for vehicular traffic. One of the recurring bones of contention, now three

years old, is the road that runs to Ramot, a fairly new outlying neighborhood. At one stretch, the road runs past the Orthodox quarter of Sanhedriyah Murḥevet, at a remove of a hundred metres. On Shabbat afternoons, some of the local inhabitants, reinforced by members of Neturei Karta from Meah Shearim, have stood on the heights overlooking the road and engaged in pelting cars with stones. Repeatedly, the police have been called in, dispersed the stone throwers and made a few arrests. But, undaunted, the ultra-Orthodox stone throwers, oblivious of the Sabbath violation involved in hurling stones, have returned again and again. Efforts on the part of the Mayor to bring together the two sides — the non-observant residents of Ramot and the leaders of the demonstrations — have proved of no avail. Though an alternative but longer route to Ramot has been provided, one that does not pass Sanhedriyah Murḥevet, some cars persist in travelling the older road. Just how this marks a gain for Sabbath observance is beyond this writer. During the height of the conflict, when hundreds took part in the rock-throwing, the official Rabbinate looked the other way and had nothing to say about pious Jews who endangered the life and limb of fellow Jews on Shabbat. After a period of quiescence, the Neturei Karta have again begun to engage in their favorite Shabbat afternoon sport. The conflict is a small indication of some of the problematics of Shabbat in the Holy City.

But for most Jerusalem residents, the Ramot Road is something to read about in the press or to see on television. For them, Shabbat begins with the long blast of a whistle, the signal that it is candle-lighting time. At first blush, it might seem curious that there is no signal to mark the end of Shabbat. The explanation lies in the fact that there is no agreement in Orthodox circles just when it is over. Though the normative halakhah fixes the appearance of three adjacent stars as the end of Shabbat, there is also the injunction that one must add from the profane to the holy, i.e., extend the Shabbat. Some of the Orthodox extend it for as much as an hour and fifteen minutes after the appearance of the three stars.

In observant homes, Friday evening is much as it has always been, a time to be spent in leisurely dining around the family table; dinner interspersed with *zemirot* and a review of the Torah portion of the week. In non-observant homes, it is the occasion for the gathering of friends and, usually, a heated discussion of the topic of the day. Israeli slang has invented a special word for this “traditional” word-fest. Since it usually takes the form of biting criticism and anger with the government or some prominent official, the exercise is known as *lekater*, literally, to fume. Then, of course, there is the television which acknowledges Shabbat by opening its evening program with a short interlude known as *Likrat Shabbat*, featuring a brief talk on the Torah portion of the week against the background of two lighted candles and one or two appropriate Shabbat hymns. While the program is pre-recorded by the Rabbi who delivers the talk, this fact has not spared him the anathema of some of his colleagues.

The feature is reported to be highly popular and in some secular Kibbuzim, the Rabbi informed me, the television set is brought into the communal dining room so that members might be able to watch it while they are at Friday night dinner. Television on Shabbat, incidentally, was once a live religious issue. When it was about to be introduced into Israel for the first time, the National Religious Party made an abortive attempt to have it suspend operation on Shabbat.

Shabbat morning finds the streets fairly free of traffic. (Are Jerusalemites fulfilling the prescription of the Shulḥan Arukh that one sleeps later than usual on Shabbat?) With thousands of people on their way to one or another of Jerusalem's more than five hundred synagogues, the special atmosphere is quite unmistakable. Though Jerusalem has an *eiruv*, making the carrying of objects on Shabbat halakhically permissible, one can see men wearing a *tallit* instead of carrying it. Members of the dozen or so hasidic sects wear their *kaftans* and *shtraimels*, each with its own distinctive style and thus identifying the particular affiliation of the wearer. At street junctures of the larger synagogues, police are stationed to divert traffic during the hours of morning services. On both Friday evening and Shabbat morning the Western Wall draws thousands of worshippers, many of whom walk long distances in order to pray there.

In contrast to American practice, services on Shabbat morning begin early, and the larger synagogues conduct two services. The early *minyan* usually begins at 6:00 a.m. though some may start even before then. In any case, the service is usually over by 10:30 or, at the very latest at 11:00 a.m. and then there is the usual kiddush. In Jerusalem, one either gives a kiddush or is invited to one. On the culinary side, the kiddush is featured by what is known as "Jerusalem kugel," which is a highly sweetened variant. In traditional homes, — such has been this writer's experience — one may be called upon to give a *D'var Torah* on the portion of the week.

Later on Shabbat morning the municipality's Culture Department sponsors a lecture or symposium. While the topic is normally drawn from the current public agenda, it is invariably preceded by a talk on the *parashah* of the week. In the late afternoon, at least one of Jerusalem's larger synagogues offers a public lecture by a scholar on an aspect of Jewish scholarship that has current relevance. Some of the synagogues in the Orthodox areas feature a *Maggid* in Yiddish. One of these preachers, who holds forth in the Shaarey H̄esed quarter, has earned a widespread reputation for his barbed wit aimed at secular Jews and draws as many as a hundred or more eager listeners from various parts of the city.

For those so minded, there is a guided walking tour, sponsored by the municipality, on Shabbat afternoon, to one or another spot of historic interest. During most of the day, the Israel Museum is open but admission tickets must be bought in advance. That is not the case with the soccer games that are held on Shabbat afternoons and that draw large crowds.

These games bring one to the heart of the problematics of Shabbat

observance in Jerusalem and, for that matter, in the country as a whole. Only the merest handful of industries are on a five-day week. For the overwhelming majority, Shabbat is the only day of leisure in the week. It is the only day when one can visit family and friends who live out of town, just as it is the only day when one can go to the beach or visit places of interest. Thus, the paradoxical situation is created that it is both easier and more difficult to observe Shabbat in the traditional mode in Israel than in the Diaspora. It is easier, since it is the national day of leisure. Hence, no matter what one's occupation or profession, there is no problem entailed in refraining from work on Shabbat. However, it is more difficult since the six-day work week curtails the opportunity for that kind of activity normally cultivated on Sunday (or Saturday) in the Diaspora.

Given the present state of the Israeli economy, the prospects of a shift to a five-day work week are quite remote. Moreover, one seriously doubts whether such a shift, if and when it should ever come about, would bring any significant increase in traditional Shabbat observance. From time to time, the suggestion has been made that *Rosh Hodesh* be declared a legal holyday, thus affording an extra day or two per month of leisure. At present, no one is actively promoting the proposal.

All this, however, is really one aspect of a more basic problem. Tersely stated, it is this: how can Shabbat be maintained in the context of the exigencies of a modern state without recourse to the *Shabbes Goy*, in this case Jews who are perfectly willing to work on Shabbat especially when such work entails significant premiums in terms of pay. There is something more than paradox in the fact that Jews in Israel can observe Shabbat in the traditional way only because other Jews are willing to serve as their *Shabbes Goyim* to maintain essential services.

To add to the anomalous situation which is in patent and flagrant violation of the Shabbat halakhah as traditionally formulated, is the fact that observant Jews are automatically debarred from entering upon such occupations as policemen, firemen, telephone operators, etc. and that, in a Jewish state. The official Rabbinate is apparently unconcerned by the situation and, to the best of one's knowledge, has never even raised the issue. This hands-off attitude may well derive from the fear that any attempt to come to grips realistically with the situation might necessitate some drastic revision or re-interpretation of traditional halakhah. Neither the *Shulḥan Arukh*, nor, for that matter, any other code of Jewish law, concerns itself with the problem of maintaining essential services for health and security in a Jewish state on Shabbat. (Maimonides' *Hilkhot Melakhim* deal with messianic time, not with the here and now.)

Given the cast of mind of the official Rabbinate, perhaps one will have to wait for the messianic time for a solution to the problem. In the meantime, Shabbat in Israel, for all its problems, is a reality quite different from what it is in the Diaspora.

Biblical Myth and Contemporary Experience: The Akedah in Modern Jewish Literature

MICHAEL BROWN

TO MORE BELIEVING AGES THAN OUR OWN, Abraham and Isaac exemplified heroic faith. Abraham was the "knight of faith," who believed in God with "the highest passion" and was prepared to sacrifice unquestioningly his son and spiritual heir at His unexplained command.¹ Isaac trusted his father and his father's God so completely that he was prepared to comply in his own destruction. The story of their encounter with God has struck different responsive chords over the centuries, as evidenced in the divergent midrashim which emerged to interpret the Biblical myth.² Those eager, willing, or forced to make the ultimate sacrifice for God sometimes read the *akedah* (the binding of Isaac, as the event is known in the Bible) story as if Abraham had, in fact, slain Isaac (who was subsequently resurrected by God), finding in father or son a role model for themselves. As a medieval Jewish pogrom victim described the events of his own day:

Fathers slaughter their sons [like Abraham] . . . Rejoicing, they make haste to affirm the Unity of Thy name. . . .³

Suffering Jews — and Christians — seeking to explain their misery found solace in the Bible's understanding of the *akedah*: a "test" of man's loyalty to God (Gen 22:1). Still others expected that the merit earned by Abraham and Isaac would accrue to them, that God would be merciful to later generations as a reward for the offering of the patriarchs. A classical midrash relates that God split the Red Sea for the Israelites departing from Egypt as a reward to Abraham, who had split the logs for his own son's sacrifice.⁴

Classical and medieval midrashim did not gloss over the moral and

1. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, tr. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, 1941), pp. 49, 37.

2. In his masterly work, *The Last Trial* (New York, 1967), Shalom Spiegel surveys the pre-modern history of the *akedah* myth.

For the purposes of this paper the word, "midrash," means all post-Biblical reworkings in prose or poetry of Biblical myth.

3. R. David bar Meshullam, *Selikhah*, cited in Spiegel, p. 135.

4. *Genesis Rabba* and other sources, as cited in Spiegel, p. 114.

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religious problems inherent in the Biblical text. Indeed, it was often the problematic aspects of the *akedah* which touched troubled people in pre-modern generations. "What was the point of the *akedah*?" a classical midrash asks, if subsequent generations were to be made to suffer in any case.⁵ Or, as a Jewish victim of the Crusaders despaired:

When were there ever a thousand [or even] a hundred sacrifices in one day,
each and every day of them like the Akedah of Isaac, son of Abraham? Wilt
Thou hold Thy peace in the face of these things, O Lord?⁶

Because of their common ground of faith with the Biblical authors, however, the classical and medieval midrash writers, who viewed the ancient myth as a reflection of their own experiences, generally admired and sought to emulate the patriarchs. They saw, in the suffering and devotion of Abraham and Isaac, nobility in the face of adversity, as well as exemplary dedication to God, whose ultimate goodness and wisdom were beyond question.

It is perhaps a commonplace that each generation recasts the myths and traditions of the past in its own light, reinterpreting the past in view of its own experiences and store of wisdom. This is done both in order to understand the past and to allow it to illuminate the present. That is the essence of midrash of which modern literary works based on ancient myth may be seen to be variations. Thus, it is not surprising that moderns, sceptics by thought and temperament, people whose historical experiences are in some fundamental ways different from those of earlier generations, should interpret the *akedah* in ways different from those of people who came before. Precisely because the *akedah* is a myth central to Jewish thought, its treatment in modern Jewish literature reflects the confrontation of Judaism with contemporary reality. (It may be noted that one cannot deal here with every modern work in which the *akedah* appears. It is the author's view, however, that the works discussed at length herein, a number of which are curiously interrelated, are in some sense representative, while at the same time being among those with greatest literary merit.)

In contemporary Israeli writing the *akedah* often appears as an ugly metaphor for the unfeeling, self-aggrandizing sacrifice of children by their actual or communal fathers on the altars of purblind commitment to Zionism and to Israel's wars. While the sacrificial motif is present in such works, the problem of faith, of man's relationship to God, which lies at the core of the ancient myth, is, for the most part, ignored.⁷ Two representa-

5. *Yalkut Shimoni, Ekhah*.

6. *Seliḥah*, cited in Spiegel, p. 20.

7. Two interesting exceptions to this general rule are Haim Hazzaz's *Be-Kolar Eḥad* (In One Noose) (Tel Aviv, 1963) and Uri Zvi Greenberg's "*Ḥazon Ha-Shladim u-Tfillah Lifnei Akedah*" (The Vision of the Skeletons and a Prayer Before Akedah), in his volume, *Rehovot Ha-Nahar* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1954). For a full discussion of Hazzaz's work, see Lawrence Joseph Wineman, "The Akedah-Motif in the Modern Hebrew Story," unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1977, pp. 51-88.

tive examples are Aharon Meged's gritty novel, *Ha-Hay al Ha-Met* (The Living on the Dead), an early recasting of the myth in this way, and Hanoach Bartov's short story, "Tikkunei Yizhak" (Isaac's Emendations), which is among the most recent.⁸

In *The Living on the Dead*, a writer, Jonas, is traumatized into writers' cramp, that is, "sacrificed," by his larger-than-life subject, the pioneer, Abrasha (Abraham) Davidov, as well as by his own father. The father and Davidov are Abraham figures remembered for their heroic deeds in service of the state-in-the-making. Jonas's father had abandoned wife and child by dying early, while Davidov is known to intimates as a child beater and a philanderer, who forces his wife to bear the burden of raising the family and making a living. His idealism is motivated, in part, by the fact that "he didn't want to stay at home."⁹ He sacrifices his own son by forcing the boy into the army, although he is so nearsighted that death is inevitable. Meged's themes are the relationships of fathers and sons, of past and present, of the weight of tradition and the freedom to be one's self. Except in passing, however, these questions are taken up in an entirely secular framework, which reflects the Biblical myth of Abraham and Isaac only dimly.

Bartov's story is even further removed from that of Genesis. Its protagonist is Reb Itshele (Isaac), a pioneer *manqué*, who had not arrived in Palestine "just yesterday."¹⁰ The phrase, "just yesterday," is an allusion to Shmuel Yosef Agnon's novel of Israel's pioneering days by the same name.¹¹ It is used by Bartov ironically to indicate that while Itshele is no newcomer to Israel, he has never been accepted as a *bona fide* member of the fraternity of founding fathers. In a society whose overriding value was physical labor, Itshele lived on the fringes of the literary-musical world, neither working nor creating. His brother describes Itshele's life as "opera," that is, literally, work, but, actually, theater. Itshele's life is presented by Bartov as an ironic commentary on the lives of the working pioneers themselves. But it also illustrates the intolerance of the society of the state-in-the-making towards those who do not fit the mould. Itshele is Isaac. He bears the name of the Biblical personality and his character; he is an onlooker and not a doer. Itshele lives in an attic apartment, high up,

8. Aharon Meged, *Ha-Hay al Ha-Met* (Tel Aviv, 1965), translated by Misha Louvish as *The Living on the Dead* (London, 1970). Citations herein are from the English edition. Meged returns to the theme of fathers and sons and the *akedah* motif in his latest novel, *Massa Be-Av* (*A Summer's Journey/ A Father's Journey*) (Tel Aviv, 1980). For a discussion of that book, see Ehud Ben Ezer, "Sharsheret shel Brihot," *Haarev* (December 26, 1980).

Hanoach Bartov, "Tikkunei Yizhak," in the collection of stories by Bartov, *Yehudi Kattan* (Tel Aviv, 1980). Another story in that collection, "Ezrim" (Trees), is also related to the theme of unfeeling sacrifice, although of the father, Avram, by his children, wife, and associates.

On the similar use of the *akedah* motif in other Israeli works, see Wineman, *passim*, and Hillel Weiss, *Dyukan Ha-Lohem* (A Portrait of the Fighter) (Ramat Gan, 1975), pp. 222-46.

9. Meged, p. 247. For a full discussion of *Ha-Hay al Ha-Met* from different perspectives, see Wineman and Weiss.

10. Bartov, p. 84.

11. See below.

like the mountain on which Biblical Isaac was sacrificed. And he is “sacrificed” by his relatives who shun him and mock him. They pronounce his name in such a way as to produce laughter. (The Biblical word, *Yizhak*, means “he will laugh.”) Their neglect, that of his friends, and of Israeli society, in general, in which Itshale can find no niche, finally motivate him to leave for Germany with his wife. There, in Sachsenhausen, site of a concentration camp, after an exploratory operation (a “sacrifice”), he dies of cancer while studying the Bible and returning to his roots. In this troubling portrait Bartov presents, then, a sacrificial victim, by the name of Isaac, and his sacrificers. And yet it is difficult to see what dimension has been added to the story through the use of the ancient motif. The connection with the Biblical story is formal and superficial, there being no sense that any one of Bartov’s characters is aware of the moral and theological concerns of the Bible. While critical of the concept of sacrifice in the Israeli context, Bartov does not take the Biblical myth seriously.

Even those modern writers who do face up to the full implications of the *akedah* and, especially, the issue of God-man relations, view the story as extremely troublesome to contemporary sensibilities. Often they relate only to the underside of the myth, seeing it mainly as one which raises questions about faith or denies God altogether. One of the first of such modern *akedah* midrashim was the poem by Haim Nahman Bialik, “*Levadi*” (Alone), written almost 80 years ago.¹² There, the greatest of modern Hebrew poets used the *akedah* as a metaphor for the relationship of God and Israel after the collapse of traditional faith under the weight of modernity’s challenges. In “*Levadi*” the Divine Presence is a crippled bird, which depends upon, yet smothers, “her son, her only one.” The reference to the *akedah* is unmistakable, echoing, as it does, God’s command to Abraham to “take thy son, thine only one, Isaac” and “make of him a burnt offering” (Gen 22:2). The speaker in the poem is the last Jew left in God’s house of study, a metaphor for Judaism. Others have fled the community of faith to the newly opened world outside. God, in a weakened, feminized manifestation (Bialik uses here the only feminine epithet for God in Hebrew, “*shekhinah*”), now desperately clings to this last, reluctant votary. Selfish and helpless, God is willing to sacrifice the only child to His (Her) own needs, binding him through guilt to an outmoded faith, denying him pleasure, light, and learning. In the Biblical story Abraham (and, by implication, God) and Isaac “walked together” to the sacrifice (Gen 22:6) in both the physical sense and the spiritual. In “*Levadi*”, God (that is, Abraham), the mother bird, and Isaac, the nestling, are physically together but spiritually “alone.” In Bialik’s poem there is no rewarding sacrifice for faith. Rather, faith itself has become a sacrifice on behalf of a

12. “*Levadi*” (1902). All citations of Bialik’s poetry are taken from H.N. Bialik, *Shirim* (Tel Aviv, 1953). Unless otherwise noted all translations of Bialik and other works are the author’s.

God capable now only of stifling man, no longer of working with him.¹³

The generalized ambivalence of modern man about God has not been the most potent of the forces undermining traditional views of the *akedah*. Historical experience, which classical Judaism assumes to be intertwined inextricably with theology, has made the *akedah* an almost inevitable metaphor for the problematics of Jewish faith in modern times. As noted above, in pre-modern times Jews frequently saw the *akedah* as an archetypal Jewish experience. Its connection with contemporary events stems from the same kind of cyclical view of Jewish history, but also from a fortuitous linguistic association. From the first translation of the Bible, the Septuagint, a standard rendering into European languages of the word, "*olah*," the word both God and Isaac use in referring to Abraham's sacrificial act (Gen 22:2,7), has been "holocaust." (In the original Greek the word means a whole, burnt offering.) After World War II "Holocaust" acquired the specific and terrible associations that it has today, and a number of Jewish writers, in Hebrew as well as in European languages, sensed more than a formal linguistic connection between the ancient myth and the recent Jewish catastrophe. Although they differ in interpreting the meaning and significance of the connection between the two events, they agree in viewing the Nazi Holocaust as a reenactment of the *akedah* and the *akedah* as a prefiguration of the Holocaust.

Theologically, the most traditional of such writers — a small group that includes Elie Wiesel and the Hebrew-Yiddish writer, Aharon Zeitlin — suggest, in their modern midrashim, that insufficiently explained suffering, sacrifice, and death have been the primary themes of Jewish history from Abraham to the Holocaust. Wiesel, in his play, *Ani Maamin* (I Believe), ultimately offers a vision of affirmation of man, if not of God. He identifies with Isaac, the survivor, in a rather traditional mode of Jewish response to disaster, finding it more difficult to come to terms with the

13. On "*Levadi*" compare Adi Zemach, *Miqra Be-Arbaah Shirim shel Haim Nahman Bialik* (Jerusalem, [1961]), pp. 19–32, reprinted in the same author's *Ha-Lavie Ha-Mistater* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 163–76.

In other poems Bialik uses the mother-bird/nestling metaphor differently. In "*Hakhnisini Tahat Knafeikh*" (Take Me Under Your Wing), written in 1905, for instance, a repentant and disillusioned nestling seeks to return to the nest, praying for warm and loving sanctuary under the mother's (God's) wing. Meged secularizes, mocks, and perhaps trivializes this very image of Bialik's in *Ha-Hay al Ha-Met*. The bird in Meged's novel is the unfaithful wife of a nihilist poet, who uses the room of author Jonas "as a humble sanctuary, an outlet for her suppressed desires, a place of refuge, where she could turn for shelter, a hostelry, a harbour from the storm" (p. 186). The nesting place for unheard prayers of Bialik becomes an unrequited-love nest in Meged's work.

On the ironic use of linguistic traditions by Meged in order to rebel against them, see Maya Fruchman, "*Hashpa'atam shel Ha-Mekorot Ha-Kedumim ve-Ha-Sifrut Ha-Hadashah al Leshono shel Aharon Meged Be-'Ha-Hay al Ha-Met*," *Ha-Sifrut* (1968-69): 723-26.

On the substitution of nationalism or sex for the divine vocation of the Jewish people, compare Baruch Kurzweil, "Self-Hatred in Jewish Literature" [Hebrew], in that author's *Sifrutenu Ha-Hadashah, Hemshekh o Mahapekha?* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, [1965]), pp. 331–401.

Isaac who did not survive and was not resurrected.¹⁴ Zeitlin, in “*Shir Ha-Akedah*” (The Song of the Sacrifice), identifies with classical perceptions of the beauty and meaning of Abraham’s faith and of Isaac’s.¹⁵ For Zeitlin, the *akedah* as a metaphor for the Holocaust lends to the latter event the significance of the former.

If, as [Isaac], the pure lamb was bound [on the sacrificial altar,]
I have been bound —
How happy I am!

Zeitlin’s Holocaust singer declares. The poet repudiates Bialik’s despair of divine power uttered after the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. That pogrom, in which only a handful of Jewish lives was lost, shook the world, which was as yet unaccustomed to genocide on any scale, and broke the faith of many Jews. In “*Levadi*” and other poems, Bialik had already written of his doubts of God. The events in Kishinev propelled him to cynicism and even denial. “O Heavens beg mercy for me!” he cries out in “*Al Ha-Shehitah*” (On the Slaughter), “*If there dwells within you a God*” (emphasis added). After the incomparably more brutal, sinister, and destructive events of the Holocaust, Zeitlin’s troubadour feels no such need for heaven’s intervention (“O Heavens, do not beg mercy for me!”). Moreover, he “knows” that “there dwells there a God,” who is laboring to bring forth the Messiah. Both Wiesel and Zeitlin are, of course, deeply troubled by the Holocaust, yet they do not seem to feel a need for radical theological adjustment in its wake. They resolve their doubts by looking beyond the event, and through it, with the traditional Biblical and mid-rashic spectacles of the *akedah*, as did generations of Jews before them.¹⁶

Other writers, however, have been unwilling or unable to see in Abraham and Isaac an explanation for the Holocaust or hope beyond it. Recognizing the moral and theological problems posed by the *akedah* myth and the Holocaust, several, including Israeli poets Natan Alterman and Amir Gilboa, have attempted to rewrite the Biblical story — and history as well — in order to escape their implications.¹⁷ In the poem, “*Yizhak*” (Isaac), Gilboa avoids a head-on confrontation with the problematics of the *akedah*-Holocaust metaphor by making the image a bad

14. Elie Wiesel, *Ani Maamin* (New York, 1973). Compare also, Wiesel’s non-fiction work, *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends* (New York, 1976), pp. 69–97, and Michael Berenbaum, *The Vision of the Void* (Middletown, Conn., 1979), pp. 110, 115, 120–21, 194.

15. Aharon Zeitlin, “*Shir Ha-Akedah*,” in the same author’s collection, *Shirim u-Poemot* (New York, 1950).

16. Compare also, Aharon Appelfeld, *Kr-Ishun Ha-Ayin* (Tel Aviv, 1972), H. Leivick [Leivick Halpern], “*Akedah*” [Yiddish], in the same author’s collection, *In Treblinka bin ich nit gevein* (New York, 1945), and David Roskies, *Night Words* (Washington, D.C., 1971), especially the sections, “*Akedah: the Sacrifice*,” pp. 2–6, and “*Song of the Akedah*,” pp. 48–49, all of which employ the *akedah*-Holocaust metaphor but tend towards a traditionalist theological position.

17. Natan Alterman, “*Al Ha-Yeled Avram*,” in *Ha-Shoah Ba-Shirah Ha-Ivrit – Mirhar*, eds. Natan Gross, Itamar Yazo-Kest, and Anna Kalinov (Tel Aviv, 1974), pp. 150–52; Amir Gilboa, “*Yizhak*,” in the same author’s collection, *Shirim Ba-Boker Ba-Boker* (Tel Aviv, 1953).

dream from which Isaac awakens. Moreover, Gilboa's Abraham, who suggests God — with Christian overtones — as well as the patriarch (He is called "father;" his blood spills on the high leaves of trees; in his "right hand" resides his strength, as in the Biblical metaphor for God's power), prefers suicide to slaughtering his son. This Abraham will not act out the part of his Biblical namesake. And, in the end, the patriarch (God Himself?) is dead instead.

Natan Alterman also softens the enormity of the sacrifice by having it not take place. In his poem, "*Al Ha-Yeled Avram*" (On the Boy, Abram), there is no Isaac. Young Abram and his family are threatened by the "sacrificial knife" (the word is the same, unusual one used in Genesis for Abraham's knife) of what is unmistakably the Nazi Holocaust. Despite the importuning of his mother, father, and sister, and of the 70 nations of the world to remain a part of Jewish fate, Abram refuses to be sacrificed. Instead, he "hears" the earlier command of God to the Biblical Abram to "go forth from your father's land" to the "land that I shall show you" (Gen 12:1). Obedience to that command (and a refusal to be part of what, in Genesis, is undoubtedly the most significant event in the Biblical patriarch's life) saves Abram. It also makes him "Abraham," the survivor-progenitor of his nation, one who has happily avoided self-sacrifice. Both Gilboa and Alterman, then, view the *akedah* and the Nazi Holocaust as enormities to be avoided by rebellion against God. Their Abrahams do not slaughter and their Isaacs are not sacrificed, not because God intervenes, but because they refuse to hear the command that Biblical Abraham heard.

Modern Hebrew literature's greatest novelist, Shmuel Yosef Agnon, and contemporary Canadian novelist, Adele Wiseman, go considerably further than do Gilboa and Alterman.¹⁸ They perceive Europe's Jews as having been bound on the altar of Jewishness by their faithful ancestors. By remaining Jews and remaining in Europe, rather than emigrating to impure America or godless Palestine, loyal Jews condemned their descendants to Auschwitz. Classical Judaism teaches that one is punished for sin and rewarded for virtue. The faithless can expect to be chastised, even killed off. Pious, loyal generations, on the other hand, can expect to be rewarded. That is the lesson of the Biblical *akedah* story itself (Gen 22:16-18). These writers, however, see the Holocaust experience as other. Dur-

18. S.Y. Agnon, *Tmol Shilshom* (Tel Aviv, 1945); Adele Wiseman, *The Sacrifice* (Toronto, 1956). The Agnon references herein are to the 1960 edition in the series, *Kol Sippurav Shel Shmuel Yosef Agnon*. The Wiseman references are to the Laurentian Library edition (Toronto, 1968).

It should be noted that the theological debate reflected in the literary works discussed herein has also been a subject for debate among theologians. Representative opposing positions have been taken by Eliezer Berkovits, whose *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York, 1973) stands at the traditionalist end of the spectrum, and Richard Rubenstein, whose *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis, 1966) represents a "death of God" position. Especially interesting in terms of this paper is André Neher's *L'exil de la parole: du silence Biblique au silence d'Auschwitz* (Paris, 1970).

ing the Holocaust, the faith of the fathers proved fatal for their children. During the Holocaust, Abraham seemed to complete the sacrifice of his son. No angel appeared to stay the hand of the believer, who, in fact, if by proxy, slew his beloved Isaac as a sacrifice to a God who did not care, or was not there, and who did not resurrect the dead.

For Agnon and Wiseman the *akedah* and, like it, the Holocaust, are acts of madness. Agnon's *Tmol Shilshom* (Just Yesterday) is set in Palestine in the years of the Second Aliyah at the turn of the century, the years of the Russian pogroms (although it was published in its final form during the Holocaust period in 1945).¹⁹ The title echoes a common Biblical phrase used by Bialik in another despairing response to the Kishinev pogrom, "*Be-Ir Ha-Haregah*" (In the City of Slaughter), to evoke the obscene apathy of nature and of God in the face of Jewish suffering.²⁰ In "*Be-Ir Ha-Haregah*" the reader is invited by the poet to "Go forth," to play the part of Abraham by leaving familiar territory and venturing onto the site of the slaughter, there to witness its outrageousness and God's powerlessness or lack of will to prevent it. Agnon's hero is also Abraham. "Like other" early Zionist "redeemers," he goes forth from "his country, his birthplace, his town," the world of traditional faith, seeking salvation in the secular homeland that is being constructed by the Zionists in Palestine.²¹ There he experiences a different kind of devastation from that of Kishinev.

More than he is Abraham, the father, however, the protagonist of *Tmol Shilshom* is Isaac, the son. His name is Yitzhak (Isaac): he is weak and indecisive. His destiny is death caused, in part, by the blind, unquestioning, and misplaced faith of others. Through an extended use of the underside of the *akedah* myth, *Tmol Shilshom* reverberates with memories of the past and presentiments of the Holocaust future leading to shattered faith. (Interestingly, Aharon Meged sees in *Tmol Shilshom* a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of their children by the Zionist pioneers. In *The Living on the Dead* the estranged wife of the writer is reading Agnon's novel when Jonas meets her some time after their divorce. She tells Jonas that she has recently dreamed that he was being chased by a dog, a dream which reinforces the identification of the writer with Yitzhak Kummer, the protagonist of *Tmol Shilshom*.)²²

Kummer is, as his family name suggests, a recent arrival in Palestine

19. It should be noted that parts of *Tmol Shilshom*, including the Balak story, were published well before the full enormity of the Holocaust could have been known or even foreseen. On the other hand, the vision of decay and destruction of the physical and spiritual worlds of European Jewry which culminated in the Holocaust found ample expression in early works of Agnon. In a sense, it can be said that he foresaw the Holocaust. Compare, for example, his novel of World War I, *Oreah Natah Laloan* (A Guest for the Night) (Tel Aviv, 1938).

20. "*Be-Ir Ha-Haregah*" (1903-04). "Behold the world as usual, / And the sun ejaculates its light as it did just yesterday."

21. *Tmol Shilshom*, p. 7.

22. *The Living on the Dead*, p. 155. On the connection between Kummer and the dog, see below.

(unlike Bartov's Itshele), one of those who did leave the Old World of Jewish eastern Europe. He is, however, a dangling man. He is unsure whether he belongs to the new generation of pioneers or to the old *yishuv* of ultra-traditionalists, who recall the world of ancestors left behind in Europe. (Much of the book takes place in Jerusalem's Batei Ungarn or Houses of Hungary neighborhood.) Kummer is attracted by revolutionary Jaffa of the secular Zionists and by reactionary Jerusalem of the pietists. Ever wavering, he eventually becomes a victim of his own folly and, even more, of the ignorant and fanatical faith of Jerusalem's old believers. In an unthinking moment Kummer, a house painter, scrawls on the back of a dog the words, "mad dog." The dog, Balak, a homeless and harmless stray like Kummer himself, comes to be regarded by the superstitious inhabitants of the Holy City's Batei Ungarn and Meah Shearim quarters as a mysterious, heaven-sent sign. To them he represents a warning not only of his own madness but also of the sins of the modern generation, a fearsome summons to repentance. Because of the way he is treated by the old believers who are terrified of the message inscribed upon him, Balak is actually driven to madness. He acquires from the Jews of Jerusalem, with their perverted fears and superannuated beliefs, a case of psychological rabies. In the end, Balak wreaks vengeance for his fate on Kummer, biting the painter and fatally infecting him.

The faith of traditional Jews in *Tmol Shilshom*, while sometimes invoking warm and often comical memories of a bygone era, belongs to the irretrievable past. For Agnon, in this novel at least, attempting to make that faith live in modern times amounts to little more than murderous madness. It leads to the useless sacrifice of Kummer, who, ironically, was prepared to reject the newfangled ways of the godless pioneers in order to live once again within the bounds of traditional Judaism.²³ Ironically, too, in *Tmol Shilshom*, faith becomes the instrument by which Balak is enabled to accomplish what his Biblical namesake could not: the destruction of his Jewish victim. The Biblical Balak, the Moabite king, sought, like Hitler, to wipe out the Israelites passing through his territory on the way from Egypt to the Promised Land. His evil designs were frustrated, in part, by a God-perceiving ass (Num 22:2-23:25). Agnon's Balak gives Kummer the fatal bite just after listening to a fervid repentance sermon given by the grotesque old believer, Rabbi Gronem Yakum Purkan.²⁴ In Biblical times, an animal could see God and instruct spiritually blind humans. In modern times, people who think they "see" God drive even animals mad and bring about the pointless destruction — or sacrifice — of man and beast alike.

23. Agnon puns elaborately on the words, *zaba* (painter), *zavua* (hypocrite), and *zavoa* (hyena). While not exactly a hypocrite in returning to Batei Ungarn and the faith of his fathers, painter Kummer cannot wholeheartedly turn back the clock of faith. He remains a potential traitor to both the old and the new. As such, he is marked for a hyena's fate at the hands of both. (Compare Jacob Katz, "Agnon Faces Religious Perplexity" [Hebrew], in *Shai Le-Agnon*, eds. Dov Sadan and Ephraim Urbach, 2nd. ed. [Jerusalem, 1966], pp. 163-77).

24. Pp. 583-95.

But the old believers are not alone responsible for Kummer's death. His own inability to opt finally either for the new secularism or the old pietism also contributes in large measure to his downfall. Kummer is an erstwhile modern. He is casual about traditional values such as sexual morality; he writes on the dog in frivolity, as no true pietist would have done; yet he is unable to reject the ways of the ultra-traditionalists. Fortified neither by firm modernist convictions nor by strong old-fashioned faith he becomes fatally susceptible to the dog's bite.

Jacob Katz has pointed out that the episode of the dog is not quite as unusual as it would seem. Apparently, Jerusalem's old believers were once in the habit of excommunicating those whom they considered heretics by tying the person's name to a dog's tail. On one occasion they went so far as to write the name of Zionist rabbi Yehiel Michel Pines on a dog's back to indicate not only his excommunication, but also their extreme disapproval of Zionism.²⁵ In writing on Balak's back, then, Agnon's Kummer is, in effect, excommunicating himself while ensuring his ultimate demise in the jaws of Balak.

Agnon seems to be suggesting, in *Tmol Shilshom*, that the *akedah* is a metaphor for Jews' complicity in their own destruction in a hostile, modern environment. Carelessness with regard to old values, without any strong convictions to replace them, leads to weakness and death, as in the case of Isaac. Blind faith in moth-eaten ideals, in an illusory or now dead God, points the way to mindlessness and cruelty, even to murder, as in the case of Abraham. The irresolvable conflict between the two modes of Jewishness, secular-modern and traditionalist-pietist, ends in the destruction of both through the agency of a dog who bears the name of one of Israel's traditional enemies. In a Holocaust world neither patriarch represents a viable role model. The foolish and irrelevant concerns of the old believers cause them to be altogether unaware of the real problems of confronting them, Kummer, and other Jews: in terms of the novel, Balak's rabies, in terms of the real world of Agnon, the writer, the destruction of the physical and spiritual world of European Jewry. Dangling as he is, Kummer is no more aware than they. His destruction becomes all but inevitable.²⁶

A less opaque contemporary Holocaust-*akedah* midrash than Agnon's and, perhaps, the angriest of any is a novel that is relatively unknown outside its native Canada, *The Sacrifice*, by Adele Wiseman. Like *Tmol*

25. "Agnon," pp. 171-72.

26. Avraham [Arnold] Band in "Ha-Het ve-Onsho 'Be-Tmol Shilshom'" [Hebrew], *Molad*, (May-June 1967), :211 also interprets Agnon's book as a Holocaust novel, although he reads the work differently.

In the story, "*Lefi Ha-zaar Ha-Sakhar*" (The Reward Is Equal to the Effort), published first in 1947 and now included in the volume, *Ha-Esh ve-Ha-Ezim*, Agnon returned to the *akedah*-Holocaust metaphor. There, however, he pulls back from the bleak vision of *Tmol Shilshom*, suggesting a kind of paradoxical affirmation of faith after the Holocaust. Significantly, the affirmation of faith is set in the medieval period and not the modern. On this story, compare Wineman, pp. 19-50.

Shilshom, Wiseman's is about emigrants from Jewish eastern Europe, in this instance to Canada from the Ukraine in the immediate post-World War I era. Written after the full extent of the Holocaust had become known, the book has none of the ambivalent nostalgia for the destroyed world of Jewish Europe that is exhibited in *Tmol Shilshom* and has little sympathy with traditional faith.

Wiseman's protagonist is Abraham, a family patriarch and a butcher by vocation. Never having completed the training necessary for a ritual slaughterer of kosher animals (*shohet*), Abraham is permitted only to carve up carcasses. Early in his career, however, he takes it upon himself to kill a cow, and that unlawful slaughter proves to be but the first of a chain of deaths in which he will be involved. His two older sons, returning home to celebrate Passover, stumble into the midst of a pogrom and are hanged. Sarah, his wife, never recovers from that event nor does he try to comfort her. Eventually she dies of a broken heart. Abraham also suffers the loss of his third son, Isaac. During a fire in the synagogue in Winnipeg, Isaac leaps into the flames to save the Torah scrolls. Of weak constitution, he is affected by smoke inhalation, lingers for a time and, rather like his mother, expires.

One other death in the career of Abraham is no less bizarre than that of Yitzhak Kummer in *Tmol Shilshom*. Abraham murders Laiah, a middle-aged whore, just as she is attempting to seduce him. She has become Abraham's confidante and, one night, after a disagreement with his daughter-in-law, Abraham flees to her. She tries to comfort the butcher in the way she knows best, urging him to become rejuvenated through her. "Forget all that," Laiah pleads, urging Abraham to live in the present rather than the past. "They're all dead," she says of his sons and wife, "we're alive."²⁷ Abraham, the traditional Jew, the butcher more at home with dead animals than with living human beings, is repelled. He has no desire to forget the dead; in Laiah he sees Lillith, the temptress of forbidden sex. With her sultry voluptuousness Laiah reminds Abraham of the cow that he had illicitly killed years earlier. He seizes the kitchen knife lying on the table and butchers her, pronouncing, as he does so, the blessing that a *shohet* recites when slaughtering an animal.

Wiseman's Abraham, then, is not only a butcher of carcasses, but of human beings, a demented killer ever sacrificing those around him on the altar of faith. His madness is like that of the old believers in *Tmol Shilshom*, a deluded belief that, like his Biblical namesake, he can hear God and know His will. The butchers threaten to harm Abraham's family if he refuses to kill the cow and acquiesce in the sale of unkosher meat. Abraham "hears" God offer the cow in place of his family, just as the Biblical God offered a ram in place of Isaac. His oldest sons are sacrificed by Abraham, who has "understood" the will of God and taught it to his children. Moses and Jacob could have celebrated Passover in Warsaw, but

27. P. 302.

they undertook the dangerous journey home, because they were imbued with Jewish filial piety. Unlike the Biblical character, Wiseman's Isaac is not Abraham's beloved son. (Or does the novelist understand the behavior of Biblical Abraham towards his son as self-serving callousness?) He is guilt-ridden because he does not share his father's faith and cannot be the rabbi or the cantor that his brothers were destined to be. He dies after rescuing the Torah scrolls in which he himself has ceased to believe. Like Kummer, he is a dangling man, who can neither reject the old nor embrace the new wholeheartedly. Like Agnon's character, Wiseman's Isaac sacrifices himself. Sarah is sacrificed as part of Abraham's mourning ritual for what might have been, for his failure to produce servants of God, the rabbi and the cantor. She dies of grief, as the classical midrash says her Biblical namesake did, assuming that Abraham had, indeed, killed Isaac. Laiah is slain because Abraham sees her as the embodiment of the unholy forces seeking to distract him from his worship of the dead. "For God's sake! . . . Hurry up!" Laiah cries out to Abraham as he is about to murder her.²⁸ She means for him to get on with the assignation. To demented Abraham, however, hers is a call to murder for the sake of heaven. At every turning-point in his life, then, Abraham's faith in God leads him to death.

If Wiseman's midrash appears perverse, the explanation lies in the twisted experiences of the Jews in recent times. Although it is not obvious in the story, it is the Holocaust to which Wiseman is responding in *The Sacrifice*. The backdrop of the story is a butcher shop, a setting strongly reminiscent of the death camps, where Jews, not cows, were dismembered.²⁹ The time of *The Sacrifice* is the inter-war and World War II years, the period of the Holocaust. The fire in the synagogue, the "two arms of flame" that "shot up . . . as though in supplication, leaping up crimson against the royal-blue sky," reflects the flames that engulfed Europe's Jews during the Nazi Holocaust.³⁰ A woman viewing the fire makes the connection explicitly, screaming "hysterically that it was a pogrom."³¹ Still more telling is Wiseman's general understanding that it was not the faithlessness of Jews that caused their destruction, but, rather, their faith, which laid them open to the depredations of others and caused them to

28. P. 303.

29. In the short story, "*Ashan*" (Smoke), in his collection of the same name, (Jerusalem, 1962), Aharon Appelfeld uses a similar setting to suggest the camps.

In a story unrelated to the *akedah* but with Holocaust overtones, "The Slaughterer," in *The Seance and Other Stories* (New York, 1968), Isaac Bashevis Singer also plays upon the *shohet*-slaughterer-Holocaust metaphor. His hero, Yoineh Meir, prefers madness and suicide to life as a killer, even of beasts. He rejects the argument of those who try to encourage him to become a ritual slaughterer, namely, that "man may not be more compassionate than the Almighty, the Source of all Compassion" (p. 18). To Yoineh Meir, God Himself is, by implication, a slaughterer. In opting for heresy and madness, he is presented by Singer as more sane and more compassionate than Wiseman's believing butcher, Abraham.

30. P. 195.

31. *Ibid.*

slaughter each other. Wiseman's Abraham believes that he can hear the commands of a God who proved in the Holocaust that He no longer concerns Himself with the affairs of Jews. Such delusion in the contemporary world is not quaint anachronism but dangerous insanity, according to *The Sacrifice*. Like the faith of the old believers in *Tmol Shilshom*, it brings in its wake butchery and death.

What has happened, then, to the *akedah* myth in a number of contemporary Jewish sources is that it has come to symbolize not faith beautiful, but faith misguided and destructive, especially in a Holocaust context. Abraham and Isaac no longer serve as role models to be emulated, as they did in pre-modern sources, but as object lessons to be avoided. Today many are "made sleepless by" the sacrifice of Isaac.³² In this, as in so many other literary developments, the poems of Haim Nahman Bialik point the way in reaction both to the challenge of modernity to traditional beliefs and to the cruel fate of the Jewish people in modern times. To be sure, some works, such as Wiesel's *Ani Maamin* and Zeitlin's "*Shir Ha-Akedah*," have remained within a generally traditional framework of understanding, even when making the connection between the *akedah* and the Holocaust. Others, however, like the poems of Gilboa and Alterman, "*Yizhak*" and "*Al Ha-Yeled Avram*," and, even more, *The Sacrifice* of Adele Wiseman and *Tmol Shilshom* of Shmuel Yosef Agnon, view the Holocaust as eliminating the possibility of perceiving beauty and value in Abraham's eagerness to sacrifice his son or in Isaac's willingness to be sacrificed. Seen in the light of the Holocaust, when the victim was, indeed, killed and for no readily apparent divine purpose, when neither the sacrificer (the faithful Jewish fathers) nor the victim was free to refuse his destiny, when no God intervened to stop the *auto-da-fé*, such sacrifice can understandably be seen as misplaced, cruel, self-destructive, and even mad.

32. Kierkegaard, p. 39.

A Jewish Response to a New Christian Theology

Review-Essay by DAVID NOVAK

Discerning the Way: A Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality. By PAUL VAN BUREN. New York. The Seabury Press, 1980.

1. *The Effect of the Holocaust on Theology*

In religions of revelation, that is, religions which constitute man's relationship with God in the context of temporal events, historical experience continually shapes that relationship. For example, the Talmud notes,

R. Phineas said that Moses established the liturgical formula, "the great, mighty and awesome God" (Deut. 10:17) . . . Daniel said, "the great and awesome God" (Dan. 9:4), but did not say "mighty" (*ha-gibbor*). — His children are prisoners (*mesurin be-qolarin*); where is His might?¹

In other words, when God's mighty intervention does not manifest itself in the affairs of humans, it is meaningless to reiterate it based on some abstract notion of Divinity.

The situation of Daniel and his generation mentioned above elucidates very pointedly, it seems to me, the situation of theology after the Holocaust. For even those of us who have not despaired of "God talk" (classically called "theology"), that "God talk" cannot express the sort of triumphalism which automatically assumes that God's might is evident in human history and that the situation of His people reflects that might in the most evident way.

The effect of all of this on Jewish theology has certainly been most immediate. In terms of its understanding of God, Jewish theology has had to reemphasize the doctrine of the suffering God, the God who goes into exile, into historical powerlessness, with His people.² In terms of its understanding of Israel, Jewish theology has had to reemphasize the doctrine of the unredeemed character of the world, and how God's people suffer most intensely because of the absence of redemption.³

1. P. *Berakhot* 7.3/11c. See *Arakhin* 10b; P. *Sotah* 5.4/20c.

2. See E.E. Urbach, *Hazal: Emunot ve-De'ot* (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 42-43.

3. See R. Judah Ha-Levi, *Kuzari*, 2.44.

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But, what about Christian theology? How has the Holocaust affected Christian theologians?

There are, no doubt, Christian theologians who see the Holocaust as a confirmation of Christian triumphalism, namely, once again the Jews have been punished for their rejection of the Christhood of Jesus of Nazareth. However, this sort of triumphalism logically entails the glorification of Adolf Hitler as *the* modern manifestation of God's might! Furthermore, since Hitler's anti-Judaism quickly became evidently anti-Christian, and since many faithful Christians suffered *with* and even *because of* the Jews, few Christian theologians would want to appear so morally outrageous as to use the world's greatest episode of mass murder as an argument for their faith. Finally, the fact that classical Christian anti-Judaism was so readily useful for Nazi anti-Semitism is something which should shock sensitive Christians first and foremost. (Indifference to the Christian implications of the Holocaust is little more than tacit agreement with this same old triumphalism so discredited by modern history.) Paul van Buren's *Discerning the Way: A Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality* can be seen as the most important statement by a major Protestant theologian to reject Christian triumphalism in general and vis-à-vis the Jews in particular, based on the historical impact of the Holocaust. He writes:

We must shoulder our own responsibility for our failure to have offered more than a token resistance to this horror, . . . If there is that . . . which can lead to harm to any of God's creatures, then our responsibility to those who come after us is to correct what we say to each other. If, for example, we leave unchallenged and do not wipe out the tradition of anti-Judaism which we have inherited, we shall have failed those who will follow us. . . . [W]e today — after 1945 — can no longer continue it.⁴

This rejection of theological triumphalism, paralleling as it does Judaism's more humble view of itself and its God, comprises the beginning point of a Jewish corroboration and possible agreement with van Buren's theological effort. As he notes in a more detailed passage, "We have generally along the Way been at least realistic enough to recognize that, whatever the church may be, it is not the Kingdom of God."⁵ Surely Judaism affirms that the Kingdom of God is not yet come and that history, therefore, is not yet over.⁶ The Holocaust has driven that point home to both faith communities. Both still have much more to learn from ongoing history.

2. *Rosenzweig's Concept of the Dual Covenant*

Van Buren's most important theological contact with Judaism is the great influence on him of Franz Rosenzweig (d. 1929), who heavily influ-

4. Van Buren, pp. 47-48. See pp. 4-5, 51. Two other Christian efforts in this direction are Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1979) and Stanley Hauerwas, "The Duty to Forgive," *SH'MA*, 10.198 (Oct. 3, 1980): 137-139.

5. Van Buren, p. 49.

6. See, e.g., *Massekhet Sofrim*, 14.12.

enced much contemporary Jewish theology. The tone of van Buren's book in its Christian view of Judaism is set by a statement such as, "Franz Rosenzweig suggested that the church's special calling is to live in God's plan in a perpetual tension between Israel and the world."⁷ Indeed, van Buren is a Christian Rosenzweigian.

Van Buren has indicated that Rosenzweig's concept of a dual covenant can be accepted on Christian grounds. In this concept Rosenzweig explained God's relationship with the Jews as being the primary manifestation of His presence to one particular people, and God's relationship with the Christian Church as being the subsequent manifestation of His presence for all humanity.⁸ However, whereas many Christians might regard the universal Christian manifestation as absorbing the particular Jewish manifestation, Rosenzweig, as part of his rejection of this philosophical designation of the superiority of the universal (epitomized by Hegel, the philosopher whom Rosenzweig knew best and turned away from most),⁹ insisted that Christianity was an outgrowth of Judaism. Nevertheless, this outgrowth cannot revert and consume its own roots without destroying its own true foundation. In his vivid symbolism Rosenzweig compared Israel to the sun and the Christian Church to its rays. Clearly, the sun transcends its rays, even though the rays extend far beyond the position of the sun itself.

Van Buren has attempted a Christian rethinking of Christianity's relation to Judaism, basing himself on Rosenzweig's concept. The question from a Jewish standpoint is whether or not Judaism admits such a special status for Christianity.

At first glance this assignment of a special Jewish status for Christianity seems to go against two traditional Jewish attitudes towards it. (1) There has been a Jewish attitude that has regarded the Christian doctrine of the trinity, and even more so the doctrine of the incarnation, as so different from Jewish monotheism as to be idolatrous.¹⁰ (2) Even the Jewish attitude which gradually accepted the trinity and even the incarnation as legitimate gentile means of intermediacy in the relationship with God (*shutfut*), although illegitimate to Jews because of the immediacy of our covenant with God, also accepted Islam as such a legitimate form of gentile worship of the One God.¹¹ Therefore, Christianity cannot claim any special status in Jewish theology except the eventual Jewish consensus

7. Van Buren, p. 26.

8. See *The Star of Redemption*, trans. W.W. Hallo (New York, 1970), pp. 298ff. Earlier, the Italian theologian, R. Elijah Benamozegh (d. 1900), had advocated that Israel is at the center of God's relationship with creation and that the gentiles, who observe Noahide law, are at the periphery (*Israel et L'Humanité* [Paris, 1914] pp. 461-462, 496, 508, 614). However, Benamozegh did not consider Christianity as true "Noahism" precisely because it has attempted to reverse this relation of center to periphery (p. 468). See *Be-Shvilay Ha-Musar*, trans. S. Marcus (Jerusalem, 1966), pp. 118ff.

9. See Rosenzweig, *Star of Redemption*, beg.

10. See, e.g., *Qohelet Rabbati* 4.13; *T. Sanhedrin* 8.7; *B. Sanhedrin* 38a; *P. Sanhedrin* 1.1/18a re Is. 44:6 and *B. Yebamot* 101a.

11. See J. Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 119ff., 163ff.

that it is not idolatry, a status that it shares with Islam. (Indeed, Rosenzweig's too easy dismissal of Islam might well be the weakest point in his theology.¹²)

Nevertheless, one can argue Jewishly for the legitimacy of Rosenzweig's assignment of a special status for Christianity in Judaism. By so doing we can meet van Buren at his most central point concerning us.

It would seem, in philosophical terms, that Judaism has more in common with Islam than with Christianity, for Islam's monotheism is not affected by such troublesome doctrines as the trinity and the incarnation. Indeed, Maimonides praises Islamic monotheism whereas he regards Christianity as idolatrous.¹³ However, Maimonides' concept of monotheism is heavily influenced by Aristotelian metaphysics. In this system of thought, God, as the Prime Mover of the universe, is one because he is immaterial, matter being the source of all plurality.¹⁴ The problem with constituting Jewish monotheism on these Aristotelian assumptions is that they entail accepting Aristotle's concept of God for whom emotional involvement, indeed any transitive action, is totally precluded because of God's self-satisfied perfection.¹⁵ As my late revered teacher, Professor A.J. Heschel, emphasized, and a point to which van Buren explicitly indebted himself in his own theology, the God of whom Scripture speaks is a God of pathos, a God intimately involved in active relationships with His creatures, a God who is moved by the acts and experiences of His people.¹⁶ When one sees this view of the dynamic God as more accurately descriptive of the God of Scripture, then one's understanding of monotheism can no longer be the simple unity of a totally monolithic, a totally detached, Divine entity. God's unity must now be conceived as a dynamic unity, a personal identity permeating a variety of self-manifestations. It is this very different kind of monotheism, operating from decidedly non-Aristotelian assumptions, that found expression in the Kabbalistic doctrine of the variety of Divine emanations (*sefirot*). Van Buren, with remarkable insight, since he had at his disposal only the English translations of some of Gershom Scholem's studies, presents this view as evidence that the Christian doctrine of a triune God is not a contradiction of the doctrine of the One God of Israel.¹⁷

If this more historical view of God is closer to the truth, then one can see how van Buren's emphasis on the historical character of revelation

12. Rosenzweig, *Op. cit.*, pp. 116ff., pp. 215-217; also, *Kleinere Schriften* (Berlin, 1937), pp. 390-391.

13. Re Islam, see *Teshuvot Ha-Rambam*, ed. J. Blau (Jerusalem, 1960), 2, no. 148. Re Christianity, see *Commentary on the Mishnah: Avodah Zarah* 1.4; *Hilkhot Avodah Zarah*, 9.4.

14. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1075a5ff.

15. *Ibid.*, 1072a25ff.

16. See A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Philadelphia, 1962), chaps. 12-15 and van Buren, pp. 110-112.

17. Van Buren, pp. 89-93. Interestingly enough, a medieval anti-Kabbalist, R. Isaac bar Sheshet Parfat (d. 1408), criticized the Kabbalistic doctrine of the *sefirot* as being too similar to the Christian doctrine of the trinity. See *Teshuvot Ribash* (Constantinople, 1547), no. 159.

gives Christianity a unique status for Judaism.¹⁸ For Christianity accepts the Hebrew Bible *in toto* as its sacred scriptures, as an indispensable part of its history of faith (*Heilsgeschichte*), unlike Islam, which is highly selective in its use of Biblical data. For this reason the same Maimonides, who was negatively disposed to Christianity and positively disposed to Islam on metaphysical grounds, was positively disposed to Christian Biblicism. On this point he ruled as an authority in halakhah (*poseq*), and this was a matter from which his metaphysics was clearly absent, that Jews may teach Scripture (and even rabbinic interpretations of Scripture) *to Christians but not to Muslims*, because only Christians accept the Hebrew Bible as the Word of God.¹⁹ Now this acceptance of the Hebrew Bible as the Word of God is based solely on historical considerations of Christianity. Those of us who have never had Maimonides' philosophical commitment to Aristotelian metaphysics can make this admission about Christianity all the more easily. Christianity is historically closer to Judaism in its own self-understanding than Islam is.

3. *Christians and the God of Israel*

Van Buren continually affirms that "No agreements on other matters can hold us together in the Way if we could not agree on one point about the One of whom we speak when we use the word *God* . . . the Holy One of Israel and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."²⁰ This is better appreciated, it seems to me, if seen against the background of what it rejects. In this sense van Buren is a critical theologian in that he reinterprets his own religious tradition.

In making this affirmation van Buren is attempting to carry the Church's rejection of Marcionism to its logical conclusion.²¹ Marcionism is the early Christian gnostic doctrine which advocated two distinct gods. The *god* of the Hebrew Bible was seen as an inferior artisan who created this world below with all its imperfections, while the *God* of the New Testament, conversely, was seen as the true Deity, the sovereign of the perfect kingdom beyond this world. For this reason Marcionism wanted Christianity to divorce itself totally from the Hebrew Bible and unequivocally to sever its roots in Judaism. The Church officially rejected Marcionism as heresy. Nevertheless, in its repeated attempts to declare its supercession of the Jewish people and its covenant, it continued to compromise with Marcionism by affirming that, somehow, the *real God* ap-

18. By "historical" van Buren does not mean history in the modern sense but, rather, the self-understanding of a community which constitutes itself in terms of events in time as it experiences and re-experiences them.

19. See *Teshuvot Pe'er Ha-Dor* (Amsterdam, 1764), no. 50.

20. Van Buren, pp. 32. Along the lines of this affirmation of the God of Israel as supreme, van Buren rejects the modern Christian scholarly tendency to refer to the God of the Hebrew Bible using the tetragrammaton as an ordinary name. He regards this as condescending. (Ibid., pp. 32-33).

21. Ibid., p. 68.

peared only in Jesus as the Christ, and that the God who appeared to Israel was only an inferior, at best preparatory, revelation of the true Divine fulness yet to come. By rejecting supercessionism as a compromise with Marcionism, van Buren has emphasized that the revelation of the Lord God of Israel is the foundation upon which Christianity stands (or falls). Thus he writes, "But it surely cannot annul or detract from that covenant. God was not double-crossing Himself in the cross of Christ."²² Inasmuch as God's revelation is His everlasting covenant with the Jewish people, this inextricable involvement in the ongoing history of the Jewish people makes affirmation of the God of Israel and the people of Israel two sides of one covenantal coin. There is no "higher God" somehow lurking behind the Lord who revealed Himself to Israel.²³ Thus, for van Buren, Jesus of Nazareth's Jewishness is essential precisely because only through Israel can anyone reach God. There is no "New Israel." As he writes, "We are called not to be Jews, but to be the historically continuing body of one Jew, Jesus Christ."²⁴

4. *A Christian Rejection of Proselytizing Jews*

There are extremely important practical corollaries of van Buren's Christian affirmation of the God of Israel and the people of Israel. The most important one for Jews is his rejection of the legitimacy of Christian proselytizing of Jews.

It would be a total denial of our own Way if we even pretended to try to show it to Jews, for they already have their own way of being in the Way and, indeed, our way of being in the Way presupposes the validity of the Way in which their ancestors were travelling before we came along and in which they continue to walk.²⁵

Now the fundamental assumption underlying all proselytizing is that the one who is missionizing believes that he or she has something which the one being missionized lacks, namely, salvation. The more that the latter lacks the more he or she needs to be shown the new faith. However, for van Buren, Judaism has never lost its primary covenantal status and, therefore, does not lack anything which Christianity can possibly supply. This admission alone, highly courageous for a Christian theologian, makes authentic dialogue between Christians and Jews possible. For

22. Ibid., pp. 82-83.

23. Ibid., pp. 87, 149.

24. Ibid., p. 156. See pp. 80, 132.

25. Ibid., p. 53. See p. 44. He wrestles with the problem that some Jews do become authentic Christians and some Christians do become authentic Jews. Christianity has traditionally approved the former and scorned the latter. Judaism has traditionally scorned the former as apostates (*meshumadim*) and approved the latter as proselytes (*geray tzedeq*). Van Buren regards this as more an individual phenomenon than something which in principle contradicts his thesis (p. 64). Indeed, if proselytizing is eliminated on both sides, such cases of conversion will be rare and varied. It would seem that most converts to either Judaism or Christianity come from non-religious backgrounds. As the rabbis put it, "general rules need not be made for unusual cases" (B. *Eruvin* 63b and parallels).

dialogue is impossible if one regards the other as lacking, as having nothing ultimately worth affirming. And, indeed, Christian proselytizing efforts with Jews have been one long monologue precluding any Jewish response for which Christians would have enough respect truly to hear.

In terms of a Jewish response, one would have to determine whether or not Jewish proselytizing is a possibility, theologically speaking. There have been attempts recently to justify Jewish proselytizing among gentiles,²⁶ but whether these include proselytizing Christians is hard to say. However, it seems to me that the rabbinic doctrine that the righteous of the nations of the world are guaranteed a place in the transcendent realm of the world-to-come, without any conversion to Judaism, permanently undercuts the very assumption underlying any proselytizing efforts.²⁷ (Van Buren's theology has now done this in Christian terms.) For the true righteousness of these gentiles is constituted by their adherence to the seven Noahide laws as *Divinely commanded and revealed norms*.²⁸ It would seem, then, from what we have seen before, that Christians fulfill this requirement of gentile righteousness more than any other gentiles because of their acceptance of the Hebrew Bible as Scripture, however differently they interpret this Scripture from the Jews. Therefore, the rejection of proselytizing, which we can now see as a *sine qua non* of Jewish-Christian dialogue, is a criterion which can be constituted out of the classical sources of Jewish tradition. (Indeed, whether Jews actually missionized in the Christian connotation of that term is highly debatable. The historical sources are not at all clear on this point.²⁹)

5. *A Point of Theological Difference*

Heretofore, because I have been so impressed, and even moved, by van Buren's theology, I have attempted to show, from the Jewish side of this Jewish-Christian reality that he proclaims, how much common ground he has cleared, how much he has enabled the Jewish-Christian dialogue to reach a deeper theological plane. In conclusion and, I hope, in the same spirit of deeper theological dialogue, I would like to take issue with him on one of his points.

In explicating the relationship between God and man in the covenant, van Buren writes:

God is not just *a* person; He is the normative person. Therefore it is . . . the one concept that links God and human beings. God is that one Person by whom we measure what it is to be persons.³⁰

26. For my critique of this, see "Should Jews Proselytize?", *SH'MA*, 9.179 (Oct., 1979): 153ff.

27. See T. *Sanhedrin* 13.2 and B. *Sanhedrin* 105a.

28. See Maimonides, *Hilkhot Melakhim*, 8.11.

29. For the sources, see B.J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (New York, 1968), pp. 13-24. However, in none of the sources cited by Bamberger do we see anything more than Jews making exposure to Judaism easily accessible to gentiles.

30. Van Buren, pp. 103-104.

Following this assertion to what he considers its logical conclusion, he writes:

In every case other than that of God, the persons we know and relate to are human persons, and an essential feature of their personhood is that they have bodies. . . . God is also, properly speaking, a person. . . . It follows that God must have a body. It is consistent with this logical conclusion that the Scriptures speak freely of God's finger, hand and arm . . .³¹

Here I think that van Buren has put forth a serious theological difficulty.

If embodiment is a *sine qua non* of being a person, then one must also ascribe sexuality to God, since personal embodiment entails gender, and, most strikingly, one must also ascribe mortality to God, since a human person's death is the disintegration of his or her body as a unified personal organism. Clearly, Biblical teaching ascribes neither condition to God and would regard any such ascription as blasphemous.³² Furthermore, a Divine body would make God an entity capable of empirical discovery as is any other "body" in the universe. The covenantal relationship with God surely precludes this type of relation, a point that makes the methods of experimental demonstration (proof) wholly inappropriate in discussion of it.³³ A body, as Maimonides pointed out, contradicts God's transcendence. It necessarily limits Him.³⁴

I think it is theologically more sound to say that God expresses Himself using such aspects of His creation, including personality and bodily images, as He judges man's situation to require.³⁵ Because of God's transcendence, including His transcendence of embodied personality, man relates to Him differently than he does to his fellow embodied human persons. God's transcendence, which is revealed in His total knowledge of the human situation and condition, enables man to submit totally to God's authority and Law as an act of free, rational, choice. This submission cannot, and should not, be made to his limited, mortal, fellow humans. Thus, shared mortality is the foundation of human equality. And the fact that this mortality is not shared between Creator and creatures is the foundation of man's acknowledgement of the kingship of God.³⁶ Thus, it makes sense to refer to God as *the King of the universe* and to see any human authorities as "kings" only in a relative way because of the limit of God's true kingship from above and the essential equality of all mortal human creatures from below.³⁷ "King" can be used by analogy in speaking of a human being in a way that "person" cannot, because "per-

31. Ibid., pp. 105-106.

32. See Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I. 46, where he indicates how carefully selective Biblical anthropomorphism is.

33. See my "Are Philosophical Proofs of the Existence of God Theologically Meaningful?", *CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM*, 34.2 (Nov./Dec., 1980): 13-14.

34. *Hilkhot Yesodot Ha-Torah*, 1.8; *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, 3.7.

35. See *Mekhilta*, Yitro, trans. J.Z. Lauterbach (Philadelphia, 1933), 2:231.

36. See my *Law and Theology in Judaism II* (New York, 1976), pp. 15ff.

37. See Num. 16:3; Deut. 17:14-20; Jud. 8:22-23; I Sam. 8:4-22; B. Berakhot 58a.

son" is intrinsic to the constitution of the human being, whereas "kingship" is only a function exercised by human persons and is not intrinsic to their being human.³⁸ God's kingship, on the other hand, is intrinsic to the very constitution of His covenantal relationship with His people and with the world. God's kingship, not his personality (which is at best an analogy from human experience) is what is covenantally normative.

I suspect, and here I am admittedly speculating, that this difference between Professor van Buren, a Christian theologian, and myself, a Jewish theologian, is because of the difference between the Torah and the incarnation as our respective primary modes of relationship with God. For a Jewish theologian, the Torah as God's Law for His people presupposes an acceptance of His kingship.³⁹ For a Christian theologian, on the other hand, God becomes a person ("and the Word became flesh") and this constitutes the foundational norm for the Church.⁴⁰ In this "Divine body" (*corpus Christi*) man and God are seen as having something essential in common.

In the history of the Jewish-Christian encounter it has been the incarnation, more than anything else, which has separated us, the two covenantal faith communities, one from the other. It still does. However, because Professor van Buren has explicated Christian theology in such a way as to see Judaism and the Jewish people as fellow-travellers, even "elder brothers and sisters," on the same Way to the Kingdom of God,⁴¹ and because his main point about the closeness of Christianity to Judaism in this journey can be corroborated in Jewish tradition, even questions of such fundamental difference as this one, now have a new context of mutual esteem in which to be discussed. This opens us to each other and enlivens our conversation on this newest stretch of the long road. Paul van Buren has done both contemporary Christianity and contemporary Judaism together a theological service of greatest import. I, for one, am grateful.

38. For van Buren, the human person is essentially embodied, social and historical (p. 22).

39. See *M. Berakhot* 2.2; *Mekhilta*, *Op. cit.*, 2:229-231.

40. See John 1:1ff.

41. See van Buren, 179-180, 196-197. For the sake of the respective integrity of both communities, van Buren is opposed to "Judaizing", that is, Christians qua Christians performing Jewish rites (p. 65).

Another View of Jewish History

Sheva Tarbuyot Yisrael (Seven Jewish Cultures. A Reinterpretation of Jewish History and Thought). By EFRAIM SHMUELI. Tel-Aviv. Yahdav. 1980. 467 pp.

Reviewed by JACOB KABAKOFF

EFRAIM SHMUELI's latest work represents a major effort to offer a pluralistic view of Jewish history and thought which differs sharply from that of our leading Jewish historians. Moreover, it clashes with the claims of Palestine-centrist historiography, best exemplified by such historians as Ben Zion Dinur and Fritz Baer.

That such a work should be forthcoming from an Israeli scholar is, in itself, a sign of openness to new conditions and new needs. The fact that Shmueli, who was born in Lodz, Poland, and received his higher education in Germany, then spent several years as a professor in American Jewish and non-Jewish institutions of higher learning, has made him receptive to a liberal, pluralistic approach to Jewish culture, and marks his book as unique in scope and execution.

Shmueli has set out to present a philosophical view of Jewish history and beliefs, beginning with the Biblical period and extending down to contemporary times. He perceives in Jewish history a succession of seven cultures which interacted with each other and which vied for ascendancy. Each interpreted its predecessor and tried to displace or diminish it in order to accentuate its own grasp of reality. In turn, each became a link in the long chain of historic continuity.

According to Shmueli's periodization, the following are the seven

basic Jewish cultures: the Biblical, which prevailed down to the Hasmonean era; the Talmudic, which lasted until the Arab Conquest in the 7th century; the poetic-philosophical, which reached its heights in the 11th and 12th centuries; the mystical, which was formulated in the 13th century and reached its climax in the 16th; the Rabbinic, which held exclusive sway in the 16th century and persisted for several hundred years afterwards; the Emancipation culture, which began in the 17th century, developed in the 18th and reached its apex in the 19th; and the nationalist-Israeli, which had its inception with the Zionist movement and finds its chief expression in present-day Israel. The first five are termed "cultures of faith," while the last two represent a radical departure from the previous ones in that they bespeak a slackening of religious faith and a response to modernity.

For Shmueli, all seven cultures operate with three fundamental categories of concepts (*avot musagim*), namely: God, Torah and Israel. They also relate, each after its own fashion, to the basic experiences which have molded the Jewish consciousness (*immahot havvayot*), such as: the exodus, the covenant, *galut* and destruction, the messianic hope and the like.

In Shmueli's theory, no single culture can lay claim to exhausting the essence of Judaism. In his perspectivist approach, there can be no monolithic or imperialistic basis for the Jewish faith. Each culture, beginning with the Bible, fashioned its own ontology and enabled its adherents to develop their own grasp of reality. Each succeeding one reinterpreted what preceded it. Often, the proponents of the new culture were led to break

with previous ones in order to champion their own specific approach and to invoke their own interpretations.

For Shmueli, the basic motivation for the development of each new culture was soteriological. Each sought to provide an overarching purpose and meaning for Jewish life. Concepts like sin, death and mortality, miracles, the *mizvot* and redemption are among those which each culture tried to redefine in order to evolve a rationale for Jewish living that would answer contemporary needs. This process was ever the result of voiced dissatisfaction with the attempts of previous cultures to furnish an adequate rationale for Jewish exile and suffering.

It is characteristic of each culture that it deemed it necessary to develop its own interpretation of the Bible. To illustrate these varying approaches, Shmueli surveys the exegesis of the *Song of Songs*. He begins with the midrashic view, which considers the love poems of the book to be an allegory of the love of God for the people of Israel. In later periods, however, exponents of the poetic-philosophical and mystical cultures presented contrasting interpretations. According to the poetic-philosophical approach, the book is intended as a guide to achieving divine wisdom.

This approach, best represented by Gersonides, is grounded in rationalism, and obviously bears the stamp of Aristotelian influence. In time, however, it gave way to a mystical view of the book, best represented by Moses Alshekh, author of the commentary *Shoshanant ha-Amakim*. According to this view, the book is said to offer a key to the divine mysteries. It incorporates hints and allusions to the future redemption of Israel and enables each individual to help bring about its realization. Gradually, this mystical view superseded the ration-

alist approach that had preceded it.

Each culture also developed its own rationale for the observance of the *mizvot*. If, in the Biblical period, the emphasis was on the covenant idea and the chosenness of Israel, in the Talmudic era it was on the practical fulfillment of the *mizvot* and their application in life situations. Talmudic interpretation was accorded equal status with the Biblical pronouncements themselves. The poetic-philosophical period gave rise to other approaches, such as those of Saadia Gaon, who differentiated between the rational and revealed *mizvot*, and of Maimonides and Judah Halevi, who developed their own emphases. In the mystical period, a cosmic purpose was assigned to the *mizvot* which, according to such kabbalists as Isaiah Horowitz (the Shelah), were said, to influence God and the heavenly powers.

Shmueli applies his perspectivist view of Jewish culture to a consideration of the role of the Hebrew language as well. Unlike other scholars who discern a continuous line of development in the language, beginning with the Bible, he maintains that each culture evolved its own linguistic terminology and its own images and concepts. The terms for the God concept, for example, differ markedly in each culture. The Talmudic *Shekhinah*, the philosophical Cause of Causes and the mystical *Ein Sof* (Infinite) are a far cry from the Biblical words for God. The prayer book, which incorporates material from the various cultures, offers many examples of linguistic pluralism. In discussing the modern rebirth of Hebrew, Shmueli warns against the danger of reducing Hebrew in the Diaspora to the status of a sacral language alone.

Drawing attention to the fact that, in the past, Jewish history was seen as static, Shmueli has chosen to underscore the forces which

have made for change. In some periods, these led not merely to accommodation or modification but, also, to transformation and revitalization. He cites as examples of such far-reaching transformations Bahya's division of the *mizvot* into the duties of the limbs and the duties of the heart, which provided a new spiritual basis for Judaism, and the emphasis of the scholars of Provence on philosophical rationalism. He dwells at length upon the radical changes in the Jewish consciousness which were affected by the Haskalah and the Emancipation periods, when the traditional messianic yearning for redemption took on new forms and the very existence of the Jews as a separate people was brought into question. The impact of modernity led to a new outlook on the Torah and *mizvot* and to new attitudes to Erez Yisrael, the Jewish peoplehood and to the non-Jewish majority.

It is in his discussion of the modern cultures of the Emancipation and the nationalist-Israeli period that Shmueli is most controversial. Referring to Gershom Scholem's well known critique of the motivations of the founders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, he finds that the contribution of the exponents of the new scholarship has been sorely underestimated. He asserts that they were not merely interested in researching the past, but they also exhibited a concern for contemporary needs as well. By no means, then, can the movement be dismissed as negativistic.

The Emancipation period introduced the study of Jewish history on an objective and scientific basis and minimized the role of theology in explaining events. The contributions of Jost, Graetz and Dubnow to Jewish historical research were of the greatest significance, but the fact remains that these men were led to seek after an overall and unifying principle in order to account

for Jewish existence and continuity. From his pluralistic vantage-point, however, Shmueli finds this quest to be flawed. He is most detailed in his criticism of the new historiography developed by Dinur and Baer in the nationalist-Israeli period. Their effort to make Jewish history serve national aims is seen as an attempt to interpret the past in the light of the needs of the present, rather than in the light of historical perspectivism.

In discussing Dinur's contribution to Jewish historiography, Shmueli finds fault with his periodization, which is dictated by his Palestine-centrism. He takes issue with dating the beginning of the Diaspora from the Arab conquest of Palestine in the 7th century, when it is well established that the Diaspora already existed in the first century. Unlike Dinur, he cannot accept the *aliyah* of Judah Hasid and his followers to Palestine in 1700 as the *terminus a quo* of the modern period. The accepted view of Graetz and Dubnow is that it started with the Haskalah movement in the middle of the 18th century. Shmueli points out that, while Palestine remained a spiritual center, the fact that it was not always the source of authority and influence militates against a Palestine-centrist view of history.

In the case of Baer, Shmueli maintains that some of the historian's conclusions concerning the history of the Jews in Christian Spain and during the Second Commonwealth are not fully substantiated. Baer affirmed the Zionist approach to Jewish historiography by stressing the elements of national unity and continuity, as well as the intensive bonds with Palestine. Shmueli feels that Baer highlighted these to the exclusion of other factors. In the latter's emphasis on the influence of German Jewish pietism on the evolution of 13th-century mysti-

cism in Spain, Shmueli sees a diminution of the contribution of the poetic-philosophical culture. He also disagrees sharply with Baer's perception of the role of the rabbis in the Mishnaic period. As over against Baer's assertion that they created the "special historical force" that has molded Jewish life down to our own times, Shmueli points up the contributions of succeeding cultures which developed their own interpretations and were responsible for many innovations.

As indicated, Shmueli holds that to define the essence of Judaism and Jewish identity on the basis of any one culture impoverishes the totality of our heritage. Neither does he see any justification for giving preference to any one culture over another. Historical perspectivism does not permit the positing of any fixed essence for Judaism.

Shmueli is well aware of the chasm which separates the five "cultures of faith" from the secular cultures of the Emancipation and nationalist-Israeli periods. The cultures of modernity have created a new frame of reference for the Jew. No longer is Jewish history viewed as a divine drama and no longer is the Bible seen as the key to the solution of all Jewish problems. The spread of secularism has brought with it a whole host of problems for the modern Jew, and particularly for the Jews of the State of Israel.

Time and again, Shmueli stresses that one of his primary reasons for writing his book and advancing his theory of cultures is to bring about a rapprochement between the opposing ideological camps in Judaism and to foster a spirit of tolerance. He is hopeful that secular Jews, upon perceiving the true nature of Jewishness as an amalgam of various cultures, will see the need for historic continuity. They should, therefore, support those religious elements that continue the process of creative interpreta-

tion and seek to apply religion to life. Both in Israel and outside of it there is need for a new balance that will retain the creative elements of the past and, at the same time, permit of reinterpretation and change.

Shmueli has advanced many cogent arguments for his theory of cultures. Some of his chapters present succinct treatments of whole systems of thought and historical processes, and his analyses are bolstered by the findings of leading theorists in the fields of historiography, sociology and religion. Whether his effort to legitimize secular nationalist-Israeli culture will meet with the approval of religionists, and whether modern secular Jews will be imbued, as he is, with an appreciation of the plenitude and richness of the Jewish cultures of the past is a moot question. Still, the reader cannot fail to be impressed by the wealth of material that Shmueli has encompassed and the effective style in which he has presented it. The book should be placed high on the list of Hebrew volumes from Israel that are worthy of translation into English.

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Biale On Scholem

Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History. By DAVID BIALE. Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1979.

Reviewed by MICHAEL L. MORGAN

CONTEMPORARY JEWISH thought has been in the midst of hard times, and any signs of vitality are encouraging, especially so when they come from unexpected quarters.

David Biale's book on Gershom Scholem is such a sign. Expecting a study of Scholem's scholarship or a biographical work, one discovers instead an ambitious intellectual portrait that tries to discern the unified pattern of Scholem's thinking about such diverse matters as Jewish theology, Jewish history, the Kabbalah, myth, tradition, Zionism, and the challenges of modern Jewish life. The result is an articulate, well-researched, extremely thoughtful book that works hard to make its case for Scholem as an important contemporary Jewish thinker.

Biale's study contains an introduction, nine chapters, and an epilogue. The introduction and first three chapters sketch the background for Scholem's Zionism, his particular approach to historiography, and his decision to study the Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition. In the course of these pages Biale gives an accurate, if abbreviated, account of the presuppositions and method of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and of Kabbalistic scholarship in the nineteenth century. He then shows how Zionist and romantic developments at the turn of the century stimulated revisions in Jewish historiography. The role of the irrational and of myth are reevaluated by historians and thinkers as diverse as Dinur, Baer, Dubnow, Buber, Berdichevski, Hurwitz, and Rubaschoff, much of whose work influenced Scholem in important ways. Biale shows how Scholem's reaction to Jewish bourgeois culture in Germany can best be plotted against these trends, first in his early attachment to Buber and then in his rejection of Buber's mystical, romantic Judaism in favor of a more historical, tradition-oriented approach to Judaism and Zionism. The third chapter ends with the first publication and translation of a letter from Zalman Schocken, in

which Scholem explains his reasons for devoting himself to the philological and historical examination of Kabbalistic texts. Scholem's deepest concern was with the remarkable capacity of normative Judaism to survive the shocks of history. Trying to understand metaphysical truth by "penetrating the mist of history" that envelops it, he sought to understand how the Kabbalah, through its symbolic interpretation of text and tradition, gave the halakhic structure of Jewish life its continued vitality. Kabbalah, he was convinced, is the key to Jewish survival; to decode it is to serve that survival in the most vigorous, devoted way.

To my mind, the fourth chapter is the heart of Biale's study. Entitled "Theology, Language, and History," it is an account of Scholem's theory of revelation and tradition and how that theory provides the foundation for Scholem's "anarchistic theology."¹ On Biale's reading, Scholem is clearly not a Kabbalist; rather, the Kabbalah is the precursor of Scholem's pluralistic, historicist study of traditional Jewish texts. Historiography, like textual commentary, contributes to a tradition as it attempts to penetrate through the "mist of history" to that metaphysical Center which gives meaning to the tradition that surrounds it and yet is itself meaningless and inexpressible.

The remaining chapters are Biale's exploration of the implication of Scholem's anarchistic theology. In Chapters 5 and 6 he traces the central role of mysticism in Scholem's view of Jewish history. That history is pluralistic and vital, constantly regenerated by the tensions between law and mysticism, between rational philosophy and irrational myth. The Kabbalah is a coherent tradition of commentary that revives Judaism at just those moments when philosophical re-

flection and its failures mark a crisis in Rabbinic Judaism. Kabbalah is a development internal to Jewish history and Jewish thought, an attempt to confront, assimilate, and appropriate myth for the purpose of Jewish survival. The nature of that myth is Gnostic, and it is Scholem's view that this Gnostic myth is a native Jewish mythology that arose in the heart of Rabbinic Judaism and flourished thereafter in the Jewish mystical tradition.

What maintains the dynamic thrust of Jewish history, then, is the struggle between the rational and the irrational, between the normative, legal, philosophical tradition and the mythological, mystical, symbolic Kabbalah. But where does such a dynamic history lead? What is its ultimate purpose and justification? In Chapter 7 Biale explores Scholem's important work on Messianism and its implications for his view of historical change. For Scholem, the real driving forces in Jewish history emerge out of the revolutionary, apocalyptic dimensions of Jewish Messianism. A pluralistic conception of tradition, such as his, acknowledges the legitimacy of even the most antinomian heresies. These heresies, when properly couched in a historical setting and prepared for intellectually, transform Jewish history utterly and dramatically. Scholem's study of Sabbatianism is aimed to show just this — how Sabbatianism developed by an internal dialectic out of the Lurianic Kabbalah and how, by negation, its apocalyptic, messianic thrust emerged from a theology that was inherently progressive and developmental. It is this very apocalypticism, moreover, that is then neutralized by the Hasidic quietism of the 18th century, a movement in which the destructive, demonic aspects of Sabbatianism are subdued at the price of its constructive vitality. For Scholem, then, Jewish history is the

dialectical journey of a plurality of conceptions of the Jewish purpose as they confront each other and the social, psychological, and economic worlds in which they are situated.

Aware of Scholem's own lifelong commitment to Zionism as an historical movement of dramatic significance for Judaism, one might hope that Biale would discuss Scholem's assessment of its Messianic aspects. Indeed, does Scholem view Zionism as Messianic in either a progressive or catastrophic sense? Biale does not disappoint. Chapter 8 is devoted to just this question, most of all to the apparent conflict between Scholem's fondness for the apocalyptic, catastrophic element in Jewish Messianism and his denial that Zionism is apocalyptic. Biale's resolution of this dilemma is to apply Scholem's own concept of the "neutralization of the Messianic" to his own Zionism, thereby forging an interesting link between Scholem's Zionism and his historiography.

Like the rationalist historians of the 19th century, Scholem is primarily an intellectual historian. Unlike them, however, he takes seriously the demonic and irrational trends that have existed in constant tension with normative, rationalist Jewish thought. His study of that counter-history, the Kabbalah, constitutes an addition to that counter-historical tradition without destroying it. But, for this very reason, one might wonder about the problems of distortion, objectivity, and relativism that would seem to violate and vitiate the neutrality of Scholem's overall conception. In Chapter 9, Biale tries to defend Scholem's counter-historical approach against these charges. He admits that Scholem begins with an assumption: what gives Judaism its vitality is the dialectical conflict of opposing forces, the forces of rationality and

irrationality. This methodological principle is an organizing hypothesis for Scholem, but, as Biale argues, it is a provisional and not a dogmatic one. Scholem claims that an openness to the historical evidence shows that this interaction between the irrational forces of the Kabbalah and normative tradition has, in fact, given Jewish history its vitality. But it need not always do so. As Biale reads Scholem, the latter is willing to jettison this hypothesis of the central role of the Kabbalah if the evidence of history were to cast doubt on it. Hence, Scholem's approach balances his own personal involvement with a scholarly detachment that employs modern categories but, at the same time, lets the sources speak.

This sketch of Biale's study of Scholem hardly does justice to the admirable erudition and subtlety of the author. Nonetheless, I hope that it shows what Biale is attempting: to put before the reader his case for treating Scholem's *oeuvre* as a contribution to modern Jewish thought.

Although we cannot examine that case in detail, we can take special note of its core. As I mentioned, that core can be found in Chapter 4. There Biale argues that Scholem's own views on revelation and tradition in Judaism constitute a "theological justification of historiography." Whatever the psychological or emotional basis for Scholem's decision to invest his life in studying Kabbalistic texts, there is also a theological reason. In short, Biale's conclusion is that Scholem's ultimate justification for engaging in an historical study of Kabbalistic texts is that such a task serves the purposes of Jewish survival. Historiography and historical science are a dialectical development within Judaism, a secular substitute, as it were, for religious commentary and pious practise. If Biale is right, Scholem not only

studies the Kabbalah; he is also a secular descendent of the Kabbalists.

These are grand, bold claims, and if Biale succeeds in proving them true, then Scholem becomes a model for how detached, objective scholarship can be seen to serve Jewish purposes. But, in order to succeed, Biale must explain what Scholem's theological views are and then show how they provide this justification of historiography. The strategy is to confront these matters directly. In several important papers,² Scholem outlines a Kabbalistic theory of revelation, language, and tradition. Does Scholem himself hold this theory? Does he believe it? And, if so, does he then use this "Kabbalistic theology" to justify his own work as an historian? Cautiously, yet decisively, Biale answers "yes" to both of these questions.

Our next task, which we cannot here carry out, would be to see exactly how Biale follows this strategy and then to evaluate his radical conclusions. My own view is that the success is at best only partial. Even if he has provided us with an account of Scholem's own theological justification for his historical studies, he has failed to explain why Scholem turned to Jewish history at all. Why to the Kabbalah rather than to some other mystical tradition? Why, indeed, did Scholem "return" to Judaism? Is he as secular as Biale would have us believe, or is his fundamental commitment to Judaism a return to history with transcendent roots? These are questions that Biale does not answer and ones that naturally emerge at the end of his fine study. Rather than chide him for what he has not done, however, it is both more fair and more honest to praise him for what he has done. His book should provoke serious reflection about what modern Jewish thought is and whether or not Scholem has made a major contri-

bution to it. For this we are in Biale's debt.

1. Biale early gives a provisional definition of anarchism: "... a philosophy that recognizes no single source of authority" (p. 2). In Chapter 4 this definition is filled out. Scholem acknowledges the authority of the pluralistic message of tradition. The source of that authority, according to Biale, is a God who is "meaningless" but "meaning-bestowing."

2. Primary among these papers are: "The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism," in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1965); "Reve-

lation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1971); "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala," *Diogenes* 79 (1972): 59-80 and 80 (1972): 164-194. Scholem also discusses revelation and tradition in important ways in "Martin Buber's Conception of Judaism" and "Reflections on Jewish Theology," reprinted in *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis* (New York, N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1976).

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Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians

Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann

Edited by Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel Swetschinski
with the collaboration of Kalman P. Bland

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